

Shaping the Hearts

of Kids with Special Needs

Spring 2014



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If You're Flappy and You Know It

by Vangie Rodenbeck

I am always trying to find simple ways to improve on the social skills that autism has robbed Noah of. I read that playing board games would enhance my son's social skills and help him learn concepts such as taking turns, making inferences, and how to lose gracefully. We introduced Noah to several games and be-

fully ignorant. Knowing this, Noah approached me with this suggestion: "Mom, trust me to show you how to use the controller. We will go slow."

As I was launched into this uncomfortable situation, I began to identify with my son. So many times, I have introduced a new skill with vigor and enthusiasm, ignoring his obvious discomfort at something so unfamiliar. Suddenly, I was the one with a distinct disadvantage, and my son was the teacher.

As Noah began a series of instructions about use of the controller, I became instantly overwhelmed. So many buttons and arrows and possible combinations left me dizzy. There is no way to describe how completely out of control I felt in this foreign setting.

Anticipating that I was ready to quit, my son intervened. "OK, Mom, take a five-minute break and we will come back." (I smiled as I realized he was using the same tactic I had used so often to keep him from breaking down at a difficult task.)

When we returned, Noah decided it was time for him to

"Suddenly, I was the one with a distinct disadvantage, and my son was the teacher."

-Vangie, Georgia

gan playing them weekly, hoping that a natural setting would assist him in developing these skills. He took to the games quite naturally and soon was requesting to play them without prompting. What I did not anticipate was his insistence on helping *me* acquire new skills as well.

Noah decided it was time to introduce his mother to the world of video games. As a girl growing up in the 1970s and '80s, I was just on the cusp of video gaming. To this day, video gaming remains an area in which I am woe-

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demonstrate while I watched. During one demonstration, he vigorously moved the controller up and down in an effort to make his avatar scrub paint off a rock. I was amazed—and was praying that I wouldn't have to accomplish that task in a forthcoming game.

Sensing my trepidation, Noah commented, "It's OK, Mom. Not everyone can do this. It is my flappiness that makes me so good at stuff like this. Thank You, God, for my flappiness!"

The "flappiness" that Noah exclaimed thanks for is also known as *stimming*, or self-stimulatory behaviors characterized by rapid hand or arm flapping, rocking, or spinning. This behavior helps a person manage overwhelming sensory or emotional input from his or her environment. Noah stims when he is excited and also when he is anxious. It is one of the most clearly autistic traits we still deal with.

I must admit, I have never thanked God for our flappiness. After years of teaching Noah to speak, stand in line, tolerate noise, withstand touch, recognize facial expressions, and understand basic social cues (not to mention how to read, write, and perform simple math), I have not been able to stop the flapping. Yet Noah has found not only peace with this disability but also usefulness in it. I suppose it is that same attitude that made him so patient as he instructed me in the finer points of video gaming. To him, it is merely an advantage that God gave him to accomplish what others cannot.

I am reminded of a beautiful old song that tells of God's majestic creativity:

All things bright and beautiful,
All creatures great and small,
All things wise and wonderful,
The Lord God made them all.*

Or, in Noah's words, "If you're flappy and you know it—FLAP YOUR HANDS!"

✍️ by Vangie Rodenbeck

Use these ideas for adapting activities included in Spring 2014 *Toddlers & 2s Teacher*.

Toddlers & 2s

Drive Me Crazy

Materials

child's wagon (or laundry basket), pillows, Frisbee

Take the concept of driving to the church building to a new level. Instead of simply playing with small cars, allow children to be physically moved and to move one another. The activity can be therapeutic as well as fun. Load a wagon with pillows, and help a child into the vehicle. Pull slowly to provide a calming motion. To help stimulate a child, pull or push the "car" in wavy curves. Give the child a Frisbee so he can steer his way to the church building.

Some children seek extra stimulation by bumping and crashing into objects. With supervision, allow these children to push or pull another child in the wagon. While a wagon is easier to pull, a laundry basket provides more resistance and work for a child's large motor muscles. The effort needed for pushing and pulling can help mellow out a sensory system that is eager for action!

Activity adaptation for:

"Driving to Church," lesson 1 Discovery Time; "Going to Church," lesson 2 Discovery Time; "Riding to Church," lesson 3 Extra Hour Discovery Time

Sensory Pantry

Materials

2 small plastic tubs; sheet 4 Bible figures; clear tape; dry cereal; tablecloth (or large towels); scoops, measuring cups, spoons, other small containers

Before Class

Tape a Bible figure to the inside bottom of each tub. Fill one tub with cereal. Place both tubs on a tablecloth.

More than a lesson adaptation, this highlights a wonderful activity as written for Immerse Toddlers & 2s Spring curriculum. Children are to look at the figure in the empty tub. They then scoop the cereal from the filled tub into the empty tub until they discover what is at the bottom of the second tub—another Bible! The activity is both an interest holder and perfect for children with tactile defensiveness. Playing with dried cereal promotes tactile perception and feels good. Stirring with a spoon provides auditory and proprioceptive feedback.

Keep the activity available for use with each unit. A picture of a church building or Jesus (or any lesson focus item) can be hidden in the tubs. Used one-on-one, the activity can engage both nonverbal and verbal children who have developmental delays.

Lesson Highlight for:

"Scoop 'n' Pour," lesson 3 Activity Time; "Digging with Friends," lesson 4 Extra Hour Discovery Time

Squish Bag Fun

Materials

material for squish bags (colored shaving gel, cornstarch with food coloring, gelatin that's not too firm, vegetable oil with food coloring, etc.), resealable bags, heavy-duty tape, stickers of children and Jesus (or other lesson-focused stickers)

Before Class

Put the squish material into small resealable bags and close. Put these bags into larger resealable bags and close securely with heavy-duty tape.

Search & Find

Materials

multiple pictures of any item you may be highlighting from the day's lesson

This activity brings a child with tactile defensiveness much closer to the fun, and the activity serves as an excellent adaptation for finger painting! Because of the cool feeling of the material through the bag, many children gradually graduate to placing their sensitive fingers directly into other squishy materials later.

Plan to use the activity throughout unit 3 as well. Use green-colored "squish material" to make a green field; add stickers of flowers. Blue-colored gel can represent water or sky; add fish or birds or star stickers. Pink or purple gel with glitter makes a beautiful background for spring holiday stickers.

Lesson Highlight for:

"Squish Bag Fun," lesson 6 Extra Hour Discovery Time; unit 3 lessons

Activities during which children search for objects hidden in the classroom are common throughout early childhood curriculum. Repetitive use of such an activity is a wonderful routine builder that can be used at the beginning of any lesson. Help children with developmental delays or cognitive disabilities by hiding objects in predictable places that they alone can search. One option is to use a surprise box each session for one-on-one searching with a special needs child.

Lesson Highlight and Adaptation for:

"Sun Search," lesson 12 Activity Time and lesson 13 Discovery Time; any lesson

Use these ideas for adapting activities included in Spring 2014 *Preschool Teacher*.

Preschool

The Great Physician

Materials

picture books with stories of Jesus

The unit 1 focus on how Jesus does great things teaches children about the miracles and healing of Jesus' ministry. A necessary focus is on illness. Before choosing an activity about visiting a doctor's office, consider the children you will have in your classroom. Children with special needs or chronic illnesses often have logged more hours in laboratories and doctors' offices than many adults. Anxiety can be aroused by the slightest mention of the word *doctor*. Instead of focusing on the doctor as a source of healing and wellness, use the lesson as an opportunity to introduce the children to Jesus, the Great Physician. Provide picture books with stories of Jesus. **ASK: What did Jesus do to help people who were sick? How does Jesus help you when you are sick?**

Activity adaptation for:

"Doctor's Visit," lesson 1 Getting Started

"Roll Me Up"

Materials

foam mat (or sleeping bag)

Use the activity time to work in a little deep-touch therapy for the child with special needs. While explaining Bible-times sleeping mats and how four friends carried to Jesus a man who could not walk, spread a foam mat on the floor. Have the child pretend to be the lame man, laying tummy down with her head off the mat. Gently roll the child tightly in the mat, leaving her head out. With consistent firm pressure, rock the child gently back and forth as you pretend to carry her to Jesus to be healed.

Activity adaptation for:

"Sleeping Mats," lesson 2 Extra Hour More! Getting Started

"I'm Still Listening"

Children with developmental delays might also experience auditory processing disorder (APD). Auditory processing is the natural process of sound moving from the ear to the brain for interpretation. While children with APD may have physically normal inner and outer ear canals, their brains struggle to interpret what to do with the information they have heard. This may result in sounds being misunderstood or jumbled. Or a much longer amount of time may be needed before an instruction is acted on. Classrooms with primarily hard surfaces and little carpet or fabric to soak up sounds make acoustic conditions particularly difficult for children with APD.

Tips for assisting these children span the gap of their deficit:

- Avoid equating obedience with immediate reaction to instruction.

Some children may just need more time to process your words.

- Gain the attention of the group before you give instructions. This will reduce extra noise that can make processing more difficult.
- Consider giving complex instructions ahead of time to children who need extra processing time. Give them the instructions privately before the activity begins, and then allow them to hear the instructions twice.
- When possible, pair an oral direction with a visual cue. For instance, if the instruction is to hop, then make a hopping motion as you give that instruction.
- For games requiring attention to the commands “stop” and “go,” consider using a bell, whistle, or visual aid.

Activity adaptation for:

“Listen and Follow,” lesson 3 Getting Started; “Following Directions” and “Do as I Say,” lesson 3 Extra Hour More! Getting Started; “Listen to Me” Game, lesson 7 Extra Hour More! Getting Started

Whisper Phone

Materials

90-degree 1" PVC pipe-fitting elbows (2 per phone), 1" PVC pipe (cut to 3" or 4" lengths, 1 per phone), clear mailing tape (or decorative duct tape)

Before Class

Fit two PVC elbows on opposite ends of a straight length of PVC pipe so that the pipes and elbows resemble the handset of a telephone. Secure the elbows to the pipe with tape.

Assist children with auditory processing delays by allowing them to repeat after you, using a whisper phone. Speaking in a normal tone of voice, children will hear their own voices magnified when speaking into the handset of a “telephone” made of PVC pipe. Whisper the Bible Memory in the child’s ear and have the child repeat the verse aloud into his whisper phone. As he hears himself speak, the child may correct many beginning or ending deletions he is making without even knowing it. Give each child his or her very own set of special listening ears with this simple and inexpensive device.

Adaptation for:

“Listening Ears,” lesson 7 Extra Hour More! Getting Started

Use these ideas for adapting activities included in Spring 2014
Pre-K & K Teacher.

Pre-K & K

Emotions in Motion

Recognizing emotions from facial expressions can be very difficult for children with special needs—especially those on the autism spectrum. Prompting these children to make a face that displays an emotion might be especially challenging. Consider the addition of visual aids to help children conceptualize what an emotion might look like as expressed on someone's face. Sources for free downloads of picture cards that help teach social behavior include:

www.do2learn.com and
www.autismteachingstrategies.com/free-social-skills-downloads-2/

Adaptation for:

“Jesus Helps Hide-and-Seek,” lesson 2 Grow and Go

Sounds Like?

Following Jesus includes obediently acting on the good news learned from God's Word. But children with auditory processing disorder (APD) may have difficulty learning if they cannot hear or quickly comprehend what is being taught. A few simple accommodations can give a student with APD the edge to participate like their typically developing peers.

- Consider using whisper phones (see the preschool adaptation on p. 6) while doing the “Beginning Sounds” activity. A whisper phone not only amplifies the voice of the student, but it can cancel out competing noise from the classroom.

- Make the vocalized instruction available more than once. For the “Listen to This” activity, consider recording the same sounds on a CD multiple times in a row. The use of headphones can also assist students as they seek to block out noises that distract their auditory attention.

- “Rhythm Match” is a fun game in which students clap back a rhythm by listening to you and then copying what you clapped. Give students with APD an edge by also allowing them to *feel* the rhythm by placing their hands on a table and rap on the table with your knuckles. With the use of their hands and their ears, the likelihood of their success is much greater.

Adaptation for:

“Beginning Sounds,” “Listen to This,” and “Rhythm Match,” lesson 7 More! Getting Started

Walk and Feel

Materials

6–8 shoe boxes, textured items (fake fur, cotton balls, rice, beans, foam packing peanuts, sand, pebbles, buttons, etc.)

Before Class

Place a different textured material in each shoe box.
Line up the boxes in a path.

Use this activity if there are children in your class who would not like the feel of paint on their feet. Have the children remove their shoes. (They can remove their socks too, if they can tolerate the sensation.) Allow each child to walk the path, placing one foot in each box. Offer the use of your hand or arm as needed for balance. Talk about how the different textures feel. Then discuss what it would be like not to have the use of their feet.

Children who would have been sensitive to paint on their feet may also be sensitive to walking the entire shoe-box path. You can accommodate this by allowing them to place their feet in one box at a time as they choose. The path helps develop motor planning and balance, and it strengthens proprioception. Watching their feet move through the path also improves eye-foot coordination.

Adaptation for:

“Feet Art,” lesson 8 Getting Started

Use these ideas for adapting activities included in Spring 2014
Early Elementary
Teacher.

Early Elementary

Title

Materials

variety of media sources (newspaper, phone, radio, small TV [or picture of a TV], news magazine, pen, newsletter, laptop or tablet computer, envelope with letter inside), large opaque bag (or box)

Before Class

Place the various media sources in the bag.

Lydia Follows Jesus

Materials

Resources sheet 5 add-on 4a and 7a-7c, whiteboard, dry-erase markers, self-adhesive magnetic strip

Before Class

Put a piece of magnetic strip on the back of each add-on figure.

The game of Telephone might be frustrating for kids with auditory processing or hearing difficulties. In addition, all kids can benefit from discussing various types of media used to send and receive news. Let the children take turns pulling items from the bag you have prepared. As each item is revealed, have the kids identify whether that object is used to send news, receive news, or both send and receive news. Sort the objects into piles that represent the three categories. (Examples: TV, receive; pen, send; phone, both). Ask if kids can think of other ways we receive and give information. SAY: **We are God's messengers, and He wants us to spread the good news about His Son, Jesus.**

Activity adaptation for:

"Telephone Chain," lesson 5 Focus In

Acting out Bible stories that involve multiple characters can sometimes be overwhelming and confusing for the student with learning disabilities. The use of story figures can add visual support and aid in the child's retelling of the story.

Draw on the whiteboard a simple scene showing a riverbank, river, and road. Add to the scene several stick-figure women sitting on the grass beside the river. SAY: **Today we are going to learn about an obedient and kind lady named Lydia. She believed in God, but when she learned about Jesus too, her faith grew!** Use the script provided in the teacher guide to tell the story of Lydia. While telling the story, use the add-on figures and prepared scene to show how the characters interacted. This can be done one-on-one or with a small group of children. Retell the story and let the child with disabilities add and move the figures. ASK: **How did Lydia become a follower of Jesus? What kind thing did Lydia do for Paul and his friends?**

Activity adaptation for:

"Bible Exploration," lesson 7 Explore His Word

Early Elementary

Around the House

Materials

self-stick notes, pencils (or markers), whiteboard, dry-erase marker

Before Class

Draw on the board a large house.

This activity adaptation gives children visual support of what happens indoors and outdoors, and it allows kids to picture ways they can do important work for God in their own homes. The activity sets up a purpose for the entire lesson, with children visualizing what they can do in everyday places.

Give each student a pencil and two self-stick notes. Explain that the kids are to draw or write on each note something they do regularly inside or near their house. After all the drawings are ready, have the children take turns posting their notes on the board. Notes that show activities they do inside their homes should be placed inside the house drawing. (Examples: watch TV, read, do homework) Notes that show things done outdoors should be placed outside the house. (Examples: wait at a bus stop, play soccer)

After all the notes have been posted, discuss how each activity shown might be used as a way to share Jesus' love with family members or friends. SAY: **Whether we are inside or outside, we can still tell people about the love of Jesus. We don't need to go on a long journey or sail on the ocean during a storm. How can you share about Jesus inside your home?**

Activity adaptation for:

"Staying Indoors," lesson 11 Focus In

Use these ideas for adapting activities included in Spring 2014 *Middle Elementary Teacher*.

Middle Elementary

Ways to Say No

Materials

candy bar, watch (or clock), picture of a computer or TV

Children who have anxiety may have difficulty when kids start calling out reasons to give in to the temptation. The activity may become too loud, and they may start to worry that they won't be able to deny their temptations. In addition, kids who are more concrete learners may need specific ways to say no to temptations. They will benefit from some practice.

SAY: **Let's talk about some of the temptations we have in our lives.** Hold up the candy bar and give the following scenario: **I see a candy bar on the kitchen counter. Mom says, "Don't eat that before dinner." Then Mom goes outside to weed the garden. Oooh, I want that candy bar! I am tempted to eat it! What should I do?** Have kids give possible positive responses, such as going outside to help in the garden, placing the candy bar out of eyesight, or reading a book. Reinforce that these are ways to say no to temptation.

Repeat this activity with the watch (staying outside past curfew time) and the computer/TV (watching a show or playing a game that has been forbidden). SAY: **When we say "no" to temptation, we show God we want to obey Him.**

Activity adaptation for:

"Tempting Reasons," lesson 3 Focus In

My Life

Materials

poster board (or chart paper), marker, glue, picture of Jesus (or a cross), pictures of kids (doing jobs, on vacation, with families, etc.) and pictures of things kids have (money, electronics, sport equipment, pets, etc.)

Some students may have difficulty with the concept of what *fills* their lives, and they may not be able to write or draw in a way that communicates their thoughts. This group activity allows everyone to participate and helps to make an abstract concept more concrete. SAY: **Let's create a poster that shows people, activities, or things that are important to us and that fill our lives.**

Draw a large circle in the center of a poster board. Have each person choose one or two pictures to add to the poster. Show the kids how to glue the pictures on the perimeter of the circle. Have them tell why they chose the pictures. SAY: **The center of our circle is empty. What should be at the center of our lives?** Show the picture of Jesus, and glue the picture in the center of the circle. ASK: **Why is it important to have Jesus at the center of our lives? What can we do to keep Jesus in the center?** Encourage group discussion.

Activity adaptation for:

"My Life," lesson 4 Make It Real

Middle Elementary

Take Aim

Materials

beanbags, paper plate, red and black markers, picture of Jesus

Before Class

Using the markers, create a simple target by alternately drawing red and black circles on a paper plate.

Shooting rubber bands may be very difficult for kids with fine-motor difficulties or impulse control, and a mishap with a rubber band can sting! Beanbags are safer to use for these reasons. In addition, ending the activity by having the kids move their bodies toward a picture of Jesus will help to solidify the concept for kids who are more concrete thinkers.

Model a gentle, underhand throw. SAY: **When I say “go,” toss your beanbags across the room the same way I did.** Allow kids to do so. Observe that the beanbags landed in various place around the room. Have the kids to retrieve their beanbags, and then display the paper-plate target. Direct the kids to throw the beanbags again, but this time toward the target. SAY: **In a game like this, it is helpful to know what to aim for. That is also true in our lives. We need a target, or goal. Our goal is Jesus! We want to obey Him.** Point to a picture of Jesus. **Show me what your life target is by moving your bodies toward the best target ever!** Have kids move toward the picture of Jesus and be seated. Discuss what they can do to keep their lives aimed toward always obeying Jesus.

Activity adaptation for:

“Take Aim,” lesson 4 Make It Real

Use these ideas for adapting activities included in Spring 2014 *PreTeen Teacher*.

PreTeen

Map Bingo

Materials

12 sheets of 8½ x 11 card stock, marker, reusable adhesive, 12 index cards, copies of map of 12 tribes of Israel (1 per student), pencils, buttons (or bingo markers) (optional: prizes for game winners)

While trying to relay large amounts of information in a short amount of time, sometimes we resort to the easiest and quickest methods, which are usually lists or scrambled words. Not all students learn using these methods.

The goal of the lesson 3 Bible Exploration activity is to introduce and reinforce on a map the 12 tribes of Israel. Keeping in mind that these names could be new and hard to pronounce, prepare wall signs ahead of time so that the written word and the spoken word can be matched and reinforced. Prepare flashcards, writing the name of each tribe on a separate index card.

Hand out the maps and have each student circle on his map the names of 8 tribes. Shuffle the flashcards and pull out one card. Read the name on the card. Whoever has circled that tribe name on his map, receives a button. Read facts about that tribe. Point out main cities in the tribe's territory. Then pull out and read another card. The first person with five buttons can call out "bingo." Continue play for several rounds until you have taught about all 12 tribes, reshuffling cards as needed.

Activity adaptation for:

"Bible Exploration," lesson 3 Explore His Word

Time Line

Materials

Resources sheets 2-4 and *Resources* CD Bible Time Line printable files (including *AssemblingBibleTimeline.pdf* and *BibleTimeLineCards1.pdf*—*BibleTimeLineCards4.pdf*), reusable adhesive, clip clothespins, glue, 4 picture-hanging strip hooks, string

Sequencing and lists are hard for some students, especially if the items are new to them. We cannot assume that all students in our classroom are equally aware of important biblical people and times. Some students may know the names in another language. Some students need a more tactile learning experience. Some need a teaching technique that is slower and not as competitive.

Placing picture hooks at each end and in the center (as needed), fasten a length of string below the displayed Bible time line. Using the prepared time line cards, students can clip the cards in order onto the string, matching the icons on the cards to those on the time line. Choose appropriate cards for each lesson in unit 1 and 2. Use this adaptation for any Bible time line activity or as a review of the week's lesson.

Activity adaptation for:

"Eight Card Shuffle," lesson 1 Make It Real; "Concentration," lesson 3 Focus In; "Old Testament Eras of Bible History Game," lesson 4 Make It Real; any activities that use the Bible Time Line

Tongue Control

Many students have a hard time transitioning from concrete terms to abstract terms. During unit 4, Tongue Control, the lessons focus on the tongue. What can be confusing to some students is that the lessons go beyond the use of the physical tongue to include what the mind decides the tongue will help to say.

Start the unit with an activity that explains the new concept. Instruct students to do different things with their tongues. (Examples: Hold your tongue between two fingers and wiggle it back and forth. Curl your tongue. Make a clicking noise with your tongue.) SAY: **You just did a few actions that show how you can control your tongue. During the next two lessons, we are going to be talking about controlling our tongues in a different way. We will use the phrases “controlling the tongue” or “taming the tongue” as we learn how God wants us to speak to, or communicate with, others. Let’s see what the Bible teaches about speaking wholesomely.**

Activity adaptation for:

“Hold Your Tongue,” lesson 12 Focus In

Tips and Encouragements

for families and
volunteers

immerse
in His Word

“When I’m Not Happy at Church”

A Note from the Editor



Welcome to *Shaping the Hearts of Kids with Special Needs*. We hope this resource helps you as you minister to the child with special needs. You also might want to check out *Shaping Special Hearts*, a blogtalk radio show dedicated to helping parents, teachers, and volunteers who want to learn more about ministering to families who have children with special needs. You can join host Vangie Rodenbeck every other Tuesday from 12:00 to 1:00 p.m. (EST) at www.blogtalkradio.com/cmconnect. You can ask questions by calling in or joining the chat room. If you miss an episode, archives are available on the site. It’s simple (and free) to sign on at CMConnect.org.

May God bless you as you teach His beloved children.

Sincerely,

Immerse Editorial Staff

This quarter’s Toddler’s & 2s curriculum features a unit entitled “I Am Happy at Church.” However, for children with special needs or developmental delays, you can anticipate days when they will *not* be happy at church. Sometimes it is difficult to detect why this is the case. If a child seems anxious when being dropped off by a parent or caregiver, consider asking questions such as “Have there been any schedule changes at home this week?” or “Did your child sleep well last night?”

If no factors are immediately apparent, ask yourself a few questions about the classroom environment. Has the classroom been rearranged? Has any furniture been moved? Have toys been relocated or rotated? (A transitional object for the child may have been moved without your knowledge.) Was the classroom or were carpets cleaned recently? (The smell of cleaners may linger longer for children who have sensitive olfactory systems.)

Don’t distress if answers do not come immediately. As with typically developing children, some days are just more stressful than others. Use this as an opportunity to pray for the child (and family) who is in distress.

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