

Shaping the Hearts

of Kids with Special Needs

Winter 2013-2014



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A Way in the Manger

by Vangie Rodenbeck

Living day to day on the autism spectrum has changed our lives. We have been forced to view each encounter and situation through a neurological lens. Questions such as “How will this event smell or sound?” and “How will his eyes process this event?” and “What hidden senses will be triggered by this event?” are

Noah in the midst of this trauma, I explained, “It’s all right because there is nothing they could take that we can’t replace. It is all right because the dogs are safe. It is all right because the police are there. It is going to be all right.”

Noah was eerily quiet as we met with police officers and they proceeded into our home. He immediately began rummaging through his room in order to mentally catalog his possessions. Suddenly, Noah came running into the living room. He made a beeline for the antique hutch where, just the night before, he had arranged our nativity set. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Noah snatch something and hold it tightly to his face. He began to flap his hands frantically. Then he ran to me and spoke the first words he had said since the trauma began. “Mom,” Noah blurted out, “it’s going to be all right. Look, they didn’t take our Jesus!” Then Noah uncoiled his small fingers from around a manger with baby Jesus inside. “They didn’t take our Jesus, Mom! It’s going to be all right!”

I must confess, to this point I had been inventorying my big-

“Trying to comfort Noah in the midst of this trauma, I explained, ‘It’s all right because there is nothing they could take that we can’t replace. . . . It is going to be all right.’”

-Vangie, Georgia

paramount to our success. And when I say event, I mean something as simple as a trip to the grocery store. Life is complicated.

A few years ago our home was burglarized just before Christmas. Realizing that someone had entered our home in violence and that the person had possibly moved, touched, or stolen some of Noah’s possessions was traumatic for him. Trying to comfort

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gest losses—my laptop and our 36” TV. Suddenly time stood still for me, the police officers, and everyone else in the room as we realized there are some things that cannot be stolen. Later that evening Noah was headed out the door with his father. He stopped at the threshold and turned to ask, “Hey, Mom, I know everything is all right, but can I take baby Jesus with me? I just want to hold Him extra close for a while.”

More than just a preoccupation with the arrangement of the nativity set, Noah saw the need to carry a part of it with him. I believe that Noah sees his world not only Christologically but also as part of a bigger story. That night Noah found a way to handle his crisis through the hope each of us can find in that manger. He found *a way in the manger*.

This is Noah’s primary perspective in all of life. He is centered by the concept that he is a minor character in a larger drama that unfolds throughout time. In this instance, that perspective manifested itself in a tight-fisted clinging to a manger figurine. By wrapping his heart so fixedly around the Christ represented therein, the violent invasion of our home seemed nothing more than an affirmation of God’s story.

Tragedy and trauma often make us feel small, insignificant, and out of control. *Who are we? Why are we here? What is our purpose? Does God have a plan for my life? What does the Bible mean to me? Can all those stories mean something to life today?* All these questions function in the same way. They ask: “Who am I in the bigger story of the world?”

The one and only answer to all our questions is to find our way —*in the manger*.

✍ by Vangie Rodenbeck

Use these ideas for adapting activities included in Winter 2013-2014
Toddlers & 2s Teacher.

Toddlers & 2s

Is Anyone Listening?

One of the disheartening parts of teaching young children with emerging language skills can be that these children understand more than they are able to say. In other words, you may frequently hear the sound of your own voice with almost no verbal feedback from the children. Children with developmental delays may give even less verbal confirmation than typically developing students.

Remember that one of the most effective early intervention strategies for children with disabilities is to provide a language rich environment. Your words do not need to be profound. Speaking often, slowly, and with simple words is all that is necessary. Your devotion to using the words of your mouth to name aloud many things God gives us is just what the child needs. And those words will not return empty (see Isaiah 55:11)!

Activity adaptation for:

unit 2 lessons

Extra Sweet Dreams

Materials

pillows, blankets, heavy quilt
(or weighted blanket)

During unit 1, children learn about the birth of Jesus. The “Sweet Dreams” activity invites children to arrange blankets and pillows on the floor to make a bed. Give children with sensory integration dysfunction an extra-sweet dream by using a heavy quilt or weighted blanket to calm them during this activity. Weighted blankets are used frequently in therapy as a method of reducing stress and anxiety for children and adults with sensory sensitivity. The calming input from the weight of a heavy blanket relaxes the nervous system and reduces excessive energies by providing proprioceptive input. While many tutorials are available online for making weighted blankets and lap pads, a heavy quilt folded over several times can provide the extra weight needed for small children.

Keep the pillows, blankets, and heavy quilt in the classroom throughout the unit of lessons, and provide time to rest “as baby Jesus did” whenever it is needed.

Activity adaptation for:

“Sweet Dreams,” lesson 1 Extra Hour; any lesson in unit 1

Toddlers & 2s

“Let’s Wait!”

Materials

items as suggested in
Toddlers & 2s Teacher

The use of a surprise box is more than just a novel way to introduce elements of a lesson. This simple teaching tool reinforces three important principles all children must internalize: repetition, anticipation, and waiting.

The use of repetition is a tool that toddlers and preschool-age children find comforting. Knowing the parts of a routine not only provides the predictability children crave but also allows them to begin adding variety within the confines of that routine. For instance, repeatedly using a surprise box each week will be a predictable part of the lesson, but the variety of the contents of the box encourages children to be spontaneous in their learning environment.

Surprise boxes also engage children in anticipation. The positive anxiety of wondering what is inside a box is a good way to teach children that not knowing what is going to happen can be fun. Learning this concept may yield big results later when your classroom routine is unexpectedly interrupted.

Finally, surprise boxes can be used to teach children the value of waiting. Small pauses before opening a surprise box can transfer to skills such as being patient during snack time or waiting patiently in a line. Use a key phrase, such as “I wonder what is inside?” or “Let’s wait before we open the box.” Follow the statement with a three-to-five-second pause. You may even ask the children to count aloud with you: “1, 2, 3.” This teaching technique can give children a good amount of practice in waiting, without causing frustration. The phrase “Let’s wait” can be used at other times when children must wait during the classroom routine.

Activity adaptation for:

“Surprise Boxes,” lessons 3 and 5; “Good Things Box,” unit 2 lessons Extra Hour

Use these ideas for adapting activities included in *Winter 2013-2014 Preschool Teacher*.

Preschool

The Waiting Game

Resources CD tracks 1 and 4

Often the nervous anticipation of the holiday season can be felt in a classroom of preschool students. For children with developmental delays, the idea of waiting is typically even more complicated. Use a simple activity to help children understand the concept of waiting. SAY: **We are excited that soon we will be celebrating Jesus' birth. But we have to be patient and wait. Let's play a game and practice waiting.**

Instruct the children to walk around the room as you play a song. Children may move as long as the song is playing. When the song is paused, the children must stop walking. During the pauses, smile and use positive phrases that reinforce the idea of patience and waiting. Children with developmental delays may need to be guided by hand the first few times through this game, but soon they will take joy in waiting with the rest of the class.

SAY: **Pause, it's time to wait.
Please be patient, we are waiting.
Freeze! You are very patient.
Just a few more seconds. Wait . . .
Wait . . . wait . . . wait. Go!**

Activity adaptation for:

unit 1 lessons

Beanbag Toss

*Teaching Pictures 6-9,
beanbag*

For children with speech and language delays, the process of formulating a sentence about a teaching picture may be difficult. Make a simple modification and ask students to direct a beanbag toward a specific picture. For example, ask a child to toss the beanbag onto the picture that shows Jesus pleasing God as a young boy. Ask another child to toss the beanbag onto the picture that shows Jesus inviting some fishermen to help Him tell others about God. Remind the children that they are telling others about Jesus when they point out pictures of Jesus. And this pleases God!

Activity adaptation for:

"Tell About Jesus Beanbag Game," lesson 9 Grow and Go

A Thousand Words

Materials

Teaching Pictures, all lessons

The most common way to evaluate children's understanding of a lesson is to ask them to tell what they remember. For children with language delays, this can be at best frustrating and at worst impossible. But it is important to remember that the lack of ability to use expressive language does not mean a lesson has not been internalized. Give children with developmental delays the opportunity to review a lesson by showing you what they have learned. Instead of asking them to verbally tell you a fact about the story, use the teaching pictures and allow the children to review the story by pointing out specific parts of the picture.

ASK: **Can you point to Jesus? John the Baptist? the angel? Matthew? Zacchaeus?**

Can you show me the gifts the wise men brought Jesus?

Can you point to the dove?

Can you show me where Zacchaeus went so he could see Jesus?

Allowing children with language and speech delays to answer by pointing out story facts will be less frustrating for the children. For them, a picture really can be worth a thousand words.

Activity adaptation for:

Bible Review, all lessons

Use these ideas for adapting activities included in Winter 2013-2014
Pre-K & K Teacher:

Pre-K & K

Spirited Shepherds

Materials

cotton balls, drinking straws, masking tape to mark a corral for the sheep

Added Fun!

After the lesson, mark off racing lanes and let the children race their sheep against one another.

Turn a dress-up activity about herding sheep into an oral-motor activity your class won't forget. SAY: **In today's Bible lesson, we will learn about some shepherds who were working at night, taking care of their sheep. Let's pretend we are shepherds taking care of our sheep.** Using masking tape, help each child create a "corral" on the floor where he can gather some sheep. Once all the areas are laid out, give each child several "sheep" (cotton balls) and a straw. Instruct the children to blow gently through the straws and herd their flocks into the corrals. Explain that sheep can be frightened easily, so children should see how quietly they can guide the sheep. Sheep do not like to be hurried, so there is no competition for which shepherd gets all his sheep corralled first. Shepherds who finish early can encourage or even help others as needed.

This fun activity can produce a calming effect that will leave the children ready to focus on the day's lesson.

Activity adaptation for:

"Shepherds at Work," lesson 3 Getting Started

Praise Bubbles

Materials

bubble solution and bubble wand

Teaching Tip

To make your own bubble solution, combine ½ c. light corn syrup, 1 to 1½ c. dishwashing liquid, and 4 c. water.

Recalling the words to songs may prove frustrating to children with language-based developmental delays. Often nonverbal children feel completely left out of corporate worship. But we can have another option for leading children in worship.

Tell the children you are going to play a praise song, and they can sing along if they want to. Explain that you will blow bubbles as the song plays. The children can clap their hands in praise as they pop the bubbles. Clapping improves bilateral functioning, balance, and motor planning. The laughter and fun that will ensue during this worship activity will surely be a joyful noise to the Lord!

Activity Adaptation for:

"Sing Praises," lesson 4 More! Getting Started; "More! Sing and Pray," all lessons

Teaching Tip

If you have the permission of the parents of a child in your class who has learning disabilities or developmental delays, this is an excellent opportunity to share about ways the child is still learning concepts that other children have already mastered. For example, SAY: **Most of you have already learned how to sit in your seat during story time, but Noah is still learning how to do that. Isn't it wonderful that God made us different?**

Lessons 11, 12, and 13 teach about times when Jesus reached out to people who were different from Him in some way. What an excellent opportunity to begin honoring the differences between the children in your classroom! SAY: **Let's talk about ways we are alike and different.** Make simple observations and then ask questions.

SAY: **Some of us are boys; some of us are girls. How many of each do we have?**

Look at the colors of our hair. How we are alike and different in this way?

Some of us enjoy doing different things. If you had a choice, would you rather color with crayons or play with toy cars?

Give other activity choices that would apply to the children in your classroom. ASK: **Did you know that some of us are different because we can do things others don't do? Some of you have learned to cut with scissors really well; some of you are still learning. Some of you can color in the lines really well; some of you are still learning. Some of you can run really, really fast; others of you are better at swinging really, really high. All this is OK because God made us different, and Jesus loves all people. God wants us to love the things that make us different so that we can love all people just as Jesus does. We can be happy for ways we are alike and ways we are different.**

Activity adaptation for:

"All About You," lesson 11 Getting Started

Use these ideas for adapting activities included in Winter 2013-2014
Early Elementary Teacher.

Early Elementary

Picture It!

Materials

pictures of Jesus, Bethlehem, a crown, and a cross; card stock; scissors; resealable plastic sandwich bags

Before class, find simple images that can be used to create picture cards. Many computers have standard clip art that can be inserted into a document, or you can search for images online that can be used. Arrange the images so that all four pictures print on one 8½" x 11" page. Copy onto card stock and cut apart. Make a set for each child.

The unit 1 Bible Memory verse, Luke 2:11, might be difficult for some students because it contains several unfamiliar words. Simplifying the words and using pictures can increase the likelihood that all children will be able to participate and remember the main idea of the verse.

SAY: Our Bible Memory from Luke 2:11 can help us remember the story of Jesus' birth. Give each child a set of picture cards. Talk about the pictures and what each represents. Ask the children to arrange their cards in order as you say the verse. Pause after you say each key word and allow the children to find the corresponding picture. **SAY: Jesus** (pause) **was born in Bethlehem** (pause), **and He is our King** (pause) **and Savior** (pause). Have the children repeat the modified verse while pointing to their picture cards.

Activity adaptation for:

unit 1 Bible Memory activities, lessons 1-5

Growing Like Jesus

Materials

whiteboard, dry-erase marker, pictures of children doing a variety of activities, self-adhesive magnetic strip, scissors (optional: chart paper, marker, reusable adhesive)

Spelling is a difficult skill for many kids with disabilities, even when working in groups. Adding pictures can provide more concrete examples and enable students with disabilities to learn concepts more thoroughly.

Before class, draw on the board a chart that has four columns. Label the columns: Mind, Body, God, Others. Find pictures of children doing a variety of activities (running, reading, playing with others, sleeping, doing school work, praying, etc.). Place a piece of self-adhesive magnetic strip on the back of each picture.

SAY: Today we're going to talk about ways children grow. Let's investigate that! Hand out the pictures so that each child has at least one. Have the children attach the pictures to the chart under the heading they think is most appropriate. For example, a picture of a child running could be placed under "Body," as it shows a way a child can grow physically. Talk about the ways children can grow in each of the four areas. **SAY: The Bible tells us that Jesus grew in these four ways too. We should want to grow like God's Son, Jesus!**

Activity adaptation for:

"G-R-O-W Spelling Game," lesson 5 Focus In

Early Elementary

Wiping Sins Away

Materials

whiteboard, dry-erase markers and eraser, masking tape, marker

Situations

telling a secret you promised to keep, cheating on a test, making fun of someone, talking back to parents, stealing something, telling a lie

Children with anxiety disorders sometimes obsess about mistakes they have made. They become concerned that they are not good enough to be forgiven. Using this activity adaptation can make the activity a bit less personal. Also, the suggested adaptation does not require placing marks on children's hands, which may help a child who has sensory issues.

Before class, place a strip of masking tape on the back of an eraser. Write "God forgives" on the tape. SAY: **God loves us, and He forgives us. What does it mean to forgive?** Allow the children to share their ideas; then write this definition on the board: *forgive*—to give up feeling bad about someone who has done something wrong to you. SAY: **We are going to act out some wrong things kids might do. Raise your hand when you know what we are doing to disobey God.** You and an adult volunteer can act out the suggested situations. As children name the sins, list them on the board. When you have finished, show the eraser that says "God forgives." Have the children take turns erasing the sins. SAY: **When God forgives us, it is like He is erasing the wrong things. God doesn't feel bad toward us; He loves us. We should learn to forgive others like Jesus forgave.**

Activity adaptation for:

"Freeze," lesson 12 Focus In

Use these ideas for adapting activities included in Winter 2013-2014
Middle Elementary Teacher.

Middle Elementary

Our Providers

Materials

slips of paper, pen, picture of Jesus, paper lunch bag, whiteboard, dry-erase marker

Teaching Tip

For a more visual approach, search online for images of adults who fill community roles and images of those people doing their jobs. Kids can match the person to the job he or she is doing.

Seeing Clearly

Materials

variety of eyeglasses (thick lens, glasses with lines drawn with permanent marker across lens, tinted lens, frames but no lens), book (or picture)

Writing and reading can be difficult for some students. An activity adaptation can provide a more concrete representation of the concept being taught. Before class, write on individual slips of paper community roles that adults hold (police officer, teacher, doctor, dentist, coach, etc.). Place the papers in a paper bag. SAY: **Many people in our community help us by giving us things we need. For example, a doctor gives us medicine. When someone gives us what we need, it is called *providing*.**

Have the kids take turns drawing slips of paper from the bag. When a slip is drawn, read what is on the paper. Ask what the person named on the paper gives to others. Act out or draw on the board the responses. Use the word *provides* as you do so. (Example: dentist—act out using a toothbrush to clean a patient’s teeth, or draw a toothbrush on the board. SAY: **A dentist provides care to keep our teeth healthy.**)

After all the papers have been drawn from the bag, show the picture of Jesus. Draw a heart and a cross on the board. SAY: **Jesus provides eternal life because He loves us. He also provides things we need.** Guide the students in naming ways God provides for them.

Activity adaptation for:

“Marker Relay,” lesson 5 Focus In

“Seeing Clearly” is an adaptation to be used for the “Follow Which Guide?” activity. The adaptation can help lessen anxiety for students who may not understand the difference in the verbal directions being given. The adaptation can also be used in place of “The Right Filter” activity, which may be too abstract for some students.

SAY: **When we need help, we should look to people whom we trust and know will help us think clearly. When we listen to people who don’t love God, we may not be able to make good decisions. Choosing the right person to help us is like choosing the right pair of glasses to use.** Allow students to look at a book through the various glasses or frames. Ask kids to tell which pair allowed them to see most clearly.

ASK: **Who gives you the kind of advice you need to make good decisions?** Encourage kids to share and tell why they chose those people. SAY: **We can thank God for providing people who help us see things clearly and make right decisions.**

Activity adaptation for:

“Follow Which Guide?” and “The Right Filter,” lesson 8 Make It Real

Middle Elementary

Bar Graph Bonanza

Materials

sticky notes, markers or pencils, whiteboard (or blank wall space)

The Match Game is an excellent way to get kids to think and learn about each other. However, having a sticky note on a forehead might be irritating for some students. In addition, students with learning delays may not read quickly enough to make a match. Simple modifications to the game can yield the same results, while accommodating these specific needs.

Give each person two self-stick notes. SAY: **Write or draw on one sticky note something that is very important to you. On the other sticky note, write or draw something else that is important to you.** (Examples: family, friends, food) When the students have finished, ask a volunteer to place her two notes on the board. Name the first important item. Other students who have written or drawn the same thing should place their notes on the board under that note. Continue until all notes are on the board and you have created a bar graph of answers. ASK: **What did you learn about your friends? What did you learn about the things that are most important to us as a class?**

Activity adaptation for:

"Match Game," lesson 11 Focus In

Use these ideas for adapting activities included in Winter 2013-2014
PreTeen Teacher.

PreTeen

Celebrate Diversity

Materials

multicultural adults and students in your congregation

Although there is no physical disability or developmental delay, learning a second language can be a very real special need for the child who has just moved from another country. Whenever possible, integrate the cultural experiences and background knowledge of English Language Learners (ELLs) into the learning environment. These children can be an excellent source for information about their home countries.

During lessons 4 and 7, involve in special ways the multicultural students and families in your congregation. In advance, ask these adults or students to share how the name *Jesus* is pronounced in their native languages. Ask them to tell what people in their home countries do to worship God. Encourage native English speakers to learn new words for *Jesus*. Exploring the fact that God is God in every country will be eye-opening to some students, and it will validate and affirm the multicultural student who may at times feel left out.

Activity adaptation for:

“Worship the King,” lesson 4 Make It Real; “Worship Here, There, and Everywhere,” lesson 7 Focus In

Let Me Show You

Materials

a shoe with shoelaces, scissors, paper

Children with hearing impairments and English Language Learners (ELLs) often have difficulty understanding verbal instructions only. The objective for the “Helping Hands” activity is for students to realize they need help from other people to accomplish some tasks. The activity is most beneficial if students discover this truth by themselves. But how do you help kids with special needs understand what you want them to do, without giving away the secret?

Start by modeling a task to its completion. First, tie a shoe and explain that this is the task to be accomplished. Next, place your left arm behind your back. Give the shoe to a volunteer, who is to figure out a way to successfully tie the shoe, but without the use of his left arm. After a few minutes, move on to the next task. Model cutting a piece of paper in half, and then place one arm behind your back. Have a volunteer try to cut a piece of paper in half, but without the use of her left arm. **ASK: Is there any way to successfully complete these tasks by yourself?**

Modeling the activity in this way will give the visual affirmation needed by some kids. Plus it clarifies the activity for all.

Activity adaptation for:

“Helping Hands,” lesson 11 Focus In

Hear Over Here

Materials

scripts and props as directed in various activities

Students with hearing impairments and attention deficiencies often find it difficult to follow a play or pantomime as the story travels from speaker to speaker. You can facilitate an optimal learning experience for everyone by following a few simple guidelines.

1. Have each speaker make an assigned movement or gesture before speaking (point to self, flex a muscle, etc.). The movement will catch the attention of listeners, and they will look in the right direction.

2. Instruct and model a slight pause between speakers. The pause will help listeners to not miss any words spoken while they are visually finding the next speaker.

3. During a pantomime, have the narrator speak and then pause while the actors act out what has been said. The actors should then “freeze” while the next part of the story is read.

4. When a student with a hearing impairment is acting in or listening to a play, he needs to see each part of the play. Make sure this student’s line of vision is clear so he can see the speaker and other actors at all times.

Activity adaptation for:

“A Scripture Play,” lesson 2 Explore His Word; “Servant Action,” lesson 3 Explore His Word; “Newscast from Jerusalem,” lesson 6 Explore His Word; all “Act It Out” activities

Tips and Encouragements

for families and
volunteers

immerse
in His Word

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 might also 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 pm (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,

New Life Through His Word
Editorial Staff

Relief for Seasonal Stress

Families who are affected by disability often experience additional stress during the holiday season. The simple act of a change in seasonal wardrobe (such as needing heavier coats, hats, or tights) can bring about stresses that deplete the energies of the family. Additionally, changes in routine due to holiday schedules can produce hidden anxiety that reveals itself at unpredictable times. Consider the following ways to minister to families of children with disabilities during the holiday season:

- Make these families aware of any changes in routine, schedule, or classroom personnel ahead of time. They may be able to explain these changes to their child at home and proactively avoid classroom stress.
- If possible, choose familiar faces when selecting substitute teachers.
- Extend extra grace and hospitality to families who arrive late to Sunday school. You never know the difficulties that were involved in something as simple as dressing their child for colder weather that day.
- Be generous with your praise. Small kindnesses are cherished when families are under extra stress and tension.
- Offer a respite team of familiar faces and friends who will spend an evening providing child care for the family so that parents can do holiday shopping.

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