

Welcoming those who have Special Needs

Jo Moore has spoken has been a speaker at our annual conference. She has worked as Deafness and Disability Adviser for Church in Society and has a daughter with special needs. We asked her to jot down some thoughts about welcoming children and adults with special needs and how we can help to ensure an inclusive approach for them and their families coming to toddler groups.

Essentially every person who comes into your toddler group has their own special need, but this is specifically thinking about those children and parents who have one or more disabilities who may decide to give your group a try. Like all family's you usually only have 1 attempt to get it right so here are some pointers to think about:

Parents

- Are your leaflets available in large clear print and simple English so every one can see them and understand them? (Especially useful if English is not their first language). The recommendations are to use a clear font such as Arial or Comic Sans and all print to be in 12 or 14pt. large print is 22pt Arial Bold.
- Can a parent using a wheelchair or motorised buggy get in? Is there an alternative entrance if needed?
- Can you help them complete the registration form if they can't see it or know how to write?
- Are there chairs for parents who can not get down to the floor or normal height one if you are only using child size chairs? Having chairs with arms available may also be useful to help some one with a mobility difficulty get up.
- Do you have tables for drinks - can you juggle a cup and walking sticks? Or a small child tugging at you and wanting to be picked up?

Children

- Having a fixed routine may help some children to know what is happening. Remember to warn the carer if it is likely to change well in advance!
- Using Widgit/Makaton symbols can be very useful for children to communicate with. Some children will give you a picture of a drink

and expect a drink in return, whilst others may point at it and expect you to supply it!

- Usually you do not need specialist equipment - just be aware of what the child can do.
- Try to offer age appropriate toys - or ask the carer to come and select some suitable ones. For example you would not want to give a 5year old a baby rattle just because they are blind and enjoy listening to noises. A rain stick may be more appropriate.
- Sometimes you will need to tell other carers about a child's disability, especially if their behaviour is different to the others attending. Some carers will feel embarrassed at their child's behaviour being different too!
- Try not to guess a child's age based on their ability. I was asked if my daughter was 6 months old when she was 2 1/2 because she could not sit up and was very small!
- Offer the carer a break to have their coffee if you have enough volunteers.
- If a carer arrives with more than 1 child they may need time to play with the sibling alone - if you can offer support ask them if they would like it - they can always say "No Thanks"
- Double check the room for escape routes - some autistic children move very quickly and are escape experts. This main mean keeping your usually open door closed or putting a person on guard - otherwise the carer can not relax at all.
- If in doubt ASK!

Remember

Children are Children first, they just happen to have additional things to cope with and Parents are the same as any other parent but they have other issues to cope with!

Useful Websites

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| Widgit Symbols | http://www.widgit.com |
| Makaton Signs and Symbols | http://www.makaton.org |
| Deaf - Signing for beginners | http://www.deafsign.com |

Contact a family <http://www.cafamily.org.uk>
Excellent resources for information about
Specific conditions and support groups

Unique <http://www.rarechromo.org>
Information about very rare conditions
and Chromosome abnormalities

Through the Roof <http://www.throughtheroof.org>
Christian organisation supporting churches
to include people with disabilities

Jo Moore

If you need specialist advice, symbols made or training sessions please
contact Jo on

moorecommunication@talktalk.net

Tel/SMS 07896 844 151

Other points to add:

Songs and stories enhanced with actions or signing can be appealing for those
with or without special needs but are obviously visual! Lots of nursery rhymes
and Christian choruses come with actions already. Why not build them into your
repertoire now so they become a natural part of the children and adults
expression and enjoyment in together times.

Special Children, Special Needs

This DVD will help churches respond to children with disabilities and
special needs in practical and inclusive ways. Sessions include how to
make church welcoming, advice on specific disabilities and special
needs, the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act and a
church that has tackled the issues.

Contributors include CCPAS Social Work Manager, Simon Bass and
'Through the Roof' Director, Paul Dicken.

NB. This DVD will provide a day's training. Follow up support and
certificates of successful completion.

Includes a free copy of Special Children, Special Needs book

www.ccpas.co.uk/shop/shop



'Hands For God' Bible books with signing

<http://www.handsforgod.co.uk/a.html>

A series of well known Bible Stories beautifully illustrated with sign language. Our vision is for all children - deaf, hearing and those with Special Needs, to have access to these stories in their schools, homes and churches and to be taught about the Christian Faith in a way they can understand. These books are interactive and equally accessible for all.

"When Jesus spoke to a deaf man the Gospels actually record the word He used: 'epthatha'. It means 'be opened', but more importantly, it was a word the man could easily lip-read. So Jesus knew about effective communications and 'Hands for Go' fits perfectly with His desire to have His message of love and acceptance understood by everyone, and especially by His special people with special needs."

Adele Sheriff and Nicola Curtis

'Hands for God'

3 Castle Street,

LINCOLN, LN1 3HU

(07743) 995014

E-mail: adele-nicola.handsforgod@ntlworld.com



Illustrated by Antonia Kemp

E-mail: antonia_illustrates@hotmail.co.uk