

Tips for Teachers: **Making Easter Accessible**



Resurrection Sunday services produce much joy and excitement for many families. Families affected by special needs and disabilities, however, may experience this excitement in a different way. Extra worship services, a change in service times, and fun family activities often disrupt the important routines that provide security for children with special needs. New clothing and shoes, while a necessity for growing bodies, may be stiff, itchy, and tight on little bodies that are sensitive to the sensation of touch. Special programming that transfers children to an unfamiliar place or has them experiencing the lesson in a different way can produce enough anxiety to make a family want to escape the whole Easter experience.

Here are a few ideas that can make changes in routine easier for these families this Easter Sunday:

- If your congregation is offering extra opportunities for worship this Easter, call ahead and speak with the family about what their needs are. Ask which service they are considering attending. Let them know what you are offering for their child's age level at each worship opportunity.
- If you expect increased attendance on Easter Sunday, consider reserving parking spots close to your building's entrance for families with special needs.
- If your congregation has a special meal to celebrate together, ask the parents what dietary restrictions you need to address so that their family could participate fully. Consider what reserved seating you need to set aside for this family so the mealtime will be enjoyable. Be sure to ask another family to join them so they aren't enjoying your hospitality alone.
- If you are adding volunteers and personnel with whom a child may not be familiar, consider introducing them to the child ahead of time. Or take pictures of the volunteers and e-mail them to the family so parents can show their child whom he can expect to see on Easter.
- As much as possible, keep the children with special needs in a space with which they are familiar. However, if special programming necessitates a change of venue, visit the room prior to Easter Sunday or take pictures of the room and show them to the child ahead of time.
- Provide a picture schedule (even for older children who may not routinely need this support) to show all the fun ways you are going to be learning about Jesus' resurrection.
- Think ahead about any multisensory items that will be added to the day's experience. (Examples: candles, food or snack items, special lighting, etc.) Let the child know ahead of time what will happen differently.
- Ask parents and caregivers what ways you think their child will best experience God's love on Easter Sunday. It may mean that you keep one small valuable part of the routine—or even start something new you hadn't even thought of.
- During and after the worship service, text (or e-mail) to parents happy messages and pictures of their child experiencing with their church friends the joy of Easter! A picture is worth a thousand words!!