



Making Your Class Special Needs Friendly

SPECIAL NEEDS FRIENDLY ACTIVITIES

Look for the Special Needs Friendly icon to identify activities that work well for all kids, including those with special needs. Additional helps and some activity adaptations for teaching kids with special needs can be found in the *Resources* printable files.

SENSORY-SENSITIVE TEACHING

Because most curriculums are written with a multisensory approach, it is easy to see why children with special needs might react in certain ways to some elements of our teaching environments. When we develop eyes, ears, and hearts that view the classroom environment through a sensory lens, we are more easily able to minister to a child who is held prisoner by his or her nervous system.

Becoming a sensory detective is easier than you might think. A simple set of questions will reveal all the information you need to understand the child's perspective neurologically. Use a simple **Sensory Inventory Form** to detect a child's sensory needs. (See the form provided in the *Resources* Special Needs Helps folder.) Ask parents or caregivers to fill out the form. Then use the **Sensory Inventory Form Key** to help you get a feel for the abilities and preferences of every child in your care.

TRAINING FOR MEETING THE NEEDS

Teachers often get the impression that teaching children with special needs is a highly specialized task that requires a teacher or volunteer to be trained and prepared for every potential eventuality. In reality, are we really prepared for every eventuality when we teach and work with typically developing children? Of course not! We simply get to know the children in our care and their individual needs. An approach that emphasizes getting to know a child's strengths and weaknesses is much less intimidating than trying to wrap our minds around scientific diagnostic criteria for certain disabilities.

Understanding someone's strengths as well as one's limitations is an approach called the Friendship Model. When we become friends, we learn about the other person as we get to know that person. Having the Sensory Inventory Form completed by parents or caregivers is one way you learn the kinds of things a child avoids because those things are unpleasant.

The Friendship Model approach is often comforting to the parent or caregiver of a child with special needs. Without labeling a child or predetermining the child's ability to participate, you are acquiring information that will enable you to get to know this child and his or her learning needs.



Making Your Class Special Needs Friendly

WHAT IS A BUDDY?

All children can join the adventure of discovering God's love if they have friends to help with their areas of weakness. The Friendship Model encourages that each special needs child has a Buddy who can be that extra help.

One boy with autism reported about the Buddy program at his church: "I can do it if my Buddy *tries with me*." This is the spirit of a Buddy—someone who is willing to try alongside a child with developmental delays or disabilities in order to help that child succeed.

Help a Buddy get to know the child's strengths and weaknesses by making the Sensory Inventory Form available ahead of class time. Then have the Buddy accompany the child with special needs to activities alongside their typically functioning peers, helping the child to participate and feel like a part of the group.

If a child with special needs becomes overwhelmed, the Buddy can provide a sensory time-out, participating with the child in a one-on-one activity. Buddies can keep a picture schedule available, helping the child know ahead of time what the activity choices will be and which activity will come next. Knowing what comes next can reduce a lot of anxiety. (See the **Picture Schedule for Early Childhood** file provided in the *Resources* Special Needs Helps folder.)