

Spiritual Individualized Education Plan



When individuals with special needs or disabilities come to church, it may be a challenge for Sunday school teachers, staff, and volunteers to know how best to include those students. ABLE Ministry, in partnership with Pentecostal Publishing House, has developed this informational form to help individuals in a Sunday school department better understand some of the challenges faced by children with special needs.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

We want all children to thrive in Sunday school rather than simply survive. There is a difference between not being mean and being intentionally kind. For example, a child may participate in a Sunday school classroom and never be teased, but also never be spoken to by a peer. As simple as it sounds, we should encourage children not to avoid children with special needs, but rather seek them out. At times, we may need to be intentional in encouraging peers to be kind. Often children shy away from things they do not understand. A simple talk by a teacher or a caregiver can go a long way to explain why a special needs child might act the way he or she does. This conversation can also include examples of ways to interact or not interact with the student.

INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PLAN (IEP)

In the United States and Canada, children with disabilities have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or a 504 Plan that is reviewed annually by parents and school staff that work with the child. The purpose of these documents is to ensure that the child receives an appropriate amount of assistance and that the correct accommodations are in place during the school day. This plan is highly detailed and specific.

It may be helpful to review the accommodation/support area of the child's IEP when considering what is needed at church. The amount of assistance needed may be less than what is provided at school, given the length and activities of a typical Sunday school class, but sections of the plan may be applicable.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Invite the parent(s) or caregiver(s) to a meeting to discuss how the church can best support the child with a disability. If they would like to participate in such a meeting, coordinate with the children's pastor, or children's ministry director, and the Sunday school teacher.
2. Provide each of the potential attendees with the example form, along with a blank version of the same form. It may be helpful to share the example form a week before the meeting to help generate ideas.
3. During the meeting, discuss any topics that are relevant and be open to any additional topics that may come up. Listen compassionately to all concerns, and be willing to consider any suggestions, even if at first it doesn't sound like they would be possible.
4. During a follow-up meeting with the staff, discuss any possible solutions and develop an action plan. Even small steps can go a long way to improving future learning.
5. It may be helpful to follow up with the teacher and parent/caregivers once a year to see if the plan is sufficient or needs to be adjusted.

A RESOURCE FOR INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES AFFECTED BY DISABILITIES

ABLE Ministry UPCI, a program of the Ladies Ministries Division, supports families and individuals affected by disabilities. It is a wonderful resource for teachers, pastors, or anyone interested in the topic of disability. For additional information or support, please visit their Facebook page or website: <http://ladiesministries.com/programs/able> or email ladies@upci.org.

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A NOTE TO PARENTS:

As a church, we are committed to showing the love of Christ to your family and supporting you in a way that displays the love of God. We believe the body of Christ is made up of many different types of people with many abilities. We welcome you and your loved one.

Although called a Spiritual Individualized Education Plan (SIEP), this process will be unlike an IEP or 504 Plan at school. An IEP meeting in a school setting can be confrontational, with parents feeling attacked or that they need to “fight for their child’s rights.” While it may be helpful to refer to any IEP or 504 Plan currently in place, we are less focused on meeting government-mandated regulations and more focused on providing the support, care, and most of all, spiritual nourishment for every member of the body of Christ.

This form provides a generic framework for a conversation. Not every question will be relevant to every child. A sample form with sample answers is provided to illustrate a range of experiences.

Child’s Name: _____

1. In simple terms, tell us a little bit about your child’s special needs.

She is in a wheelchair and although she is six years old, she functions at the level of a three-year-old.

2. If it would be helpful for us to know, does your child have an official medical diagnosis?

She has been diagnosed with scoliosis and developmental delay.

3. What interests your child? Is there anything that is especially motivating?

She loves animals but hates frogs. Singing is her favorite thing, and she will do anything for potato chips.

4. Are there any special diets or food allergies that we need to be aware of?

She has a gluten intolerance and can only eat food brought from home. If the lesson requires a snack, is it possible to let us know in advance so we can prepare something similar?

5. Does your child have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or a 504 Plan in place at school? What accommodations and supports are included? NOTE: The same assistance might not be necessary since Sunday school is much shorter and structured, but this may be a helpful place to start.

She has a one-on-one support aide at school. Can we start there? As she gets more comfortable and used to the routine, she should be fine.

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6. Discuss the typical parts of the Sunday school class. Talk about where the kids are located and what they do. On a scale of 1–5, what is the child’s level of independence? During each part of the class, are there supports or modifications that might be needed?

Teacher Response: First we take attendance using stickers and then we sing a few songs sitting in chairs. Then we tell a Bible story, play a game, and then do a coloring craft, sometimes with glue or cutting at a table. At the end a snack is provided.

Parent Response: Singing and paying attention: She is a five—no support needed. Craft: She is about a three. She can color, but she cannot cut or glue. Things need to be cut out for her. I think her wheelchair is at the right height for the table. Can a chair be removed so she has a spot to sit?

7. Is there anything about classroom layout or decor that should be considered?

It would be best if the tables were moved so her wheelchair can fit between them. Can you make sure she sits toward the front and that kids don’t stand right in front of her so she can clearly see the teacher? She is easily distracted. Decorations that move and hang from the ceiling should not interfere with her line of sight when the story is told.

8. Is your child potty-trained? Does he or she need bathroom assistance? What is the church’s policy?
NOTE: Some churches have policies such as (1) if the child is over five years old and needs to be changed, the parent is called or (2) there are always two staff members in attendance when a child is in the bathroom.

My child is potty-trained but might need a reminder to wash her hands.

9. Does your child’s disability prevent regular class attendance? If so, how can the church support the child?

Can the take-home paper and lesson be mailed to her if she misses class or has a long hospital stay? I have both Skype and Facetime. Is it possible to connect over the phone for the Bible story?

10. Does your child have any challenging behavior(s)? What do you typically do in response? Are there certain things that make him/her anxious, sad, or fearful that we need to be aware of?

Singing “Happy Birthday” and balloons cause her great anxiety. She has been known to throw things and scream if she sees a balloon. If the song must be sung or balloons are used, please allow her to take a break and leave the room.

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11. How old is your child? What grade is your child currently in at school? Which class is your child in at Sunday school?

She is six years old, and at school she is in first grade. She functions at about a three-year-old level. Right now she is in the kindergarten class, which is perfect for her. I would like to keep her in the younger class one more summer. In September I would like to move her to the next class, but she may need a one-on-one helper for a while until she gets used to the class, either an adult or a peer.

12. Are there other events and activities at church that would be helpful to discuss such as children's church, VBS, youth events, and so on?

Can we get the songs and memory verses for the Christmas play in advance so we can learn them at home? It takes her a little longer to learn them, so more practice is needed.

13. Is there anything that we missed? Anything else we need to consider? Any medical issues to discuss?

I am available to come in and talk about her specific disability and answer any questions the class may have.

14. As you look toward the future, what are your hopes and dreams for your child's participation?

I dream of a day that she will live in an apartment by herself with support and that there will be people in the church that love her and encourage her to attend church. I think she would like to sing in the choir when she gets older.

15. What things would you like us to focus on this year as we move toward that future?

Right now, I would just be happy if she had a friend at church. Would it be possible to assign someone to be her helper in class? Maybe on a rotating basis?

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Parent Response:

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