



BRINGING CHILDREN with SPECIAL NEEDS INTO THE CHURCH YOUTH COMMUNITY: SMALL GROUP EDITION

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Particular Special Needs

- Focus on Social and Behavioral Issues
 - ADHD
 - Autistic Spectrum
 - Tourette's Syndrome





ADHD

- **Inattention**
 - easily distracted, miss details, forget things, become bored with a task quickly unless they are doing something enjoyable
 - have difficulty focusing attention on organizing and completing a task
- **Hyperactivity**
 - talk nonstop
 - constantly in motion
 - difficulty doing quiet tasks or activities
- **Impulsivity**
 - impatient
 - blurt out inappropriate comments, show their emotions without restraint, and act without regard for consequences
 - often interrupt conversations or others' activities.





Autistic Spectrum

- Impaired social relationships
- Communication and language deficits
 - tendency to become absorbed in a particular topic and not know when others are bored with conversation
- Cognitive impairment
- Unusual responsiveness to sensory stimuli
 - unable to balance the senses appropriately
- Insistence on sameness and perseverations
- Ritualistic and unusual behavior patterns
- Repetitive behaviors



Tourette's Syndrome

- Motor tics
- Vocal tics

Where are we going?





National Trends

- There are more than 6.3 million identified special needs children and youth in our schools today (U.S. Department of Education, 2004)
- Increasing numbers of these students are finding their way to church programs



Our Calling





Public School and Megachurches set the trends...

Public School



Megachurches



Small churches





Can the Secular World Offer Us Help?

- The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1975

“changed the face of education in this country” (p. 19)

Heward, W. L. (2006). *Exceptional Children: An introduction to special education*.



So what can realistically do in your setting? How do you start?



Step One: Identifying the Need to Address Youth with Disabilities



Identifying the Need to Address Children and Youth with Disabilities in a Church

- “We first saw ADHD kids coming into our church, getting into trouble, risk-taking. Then we also started getting a number of people with physical disabilities...”
- David
 - Special Education certification, educational consultant
 - Member of Suburban Philadelphia Mennonite Church



Identifying the Need to Address Youth with Disabilities in a Church

- If the church does not address the need of children with disabilities, the church runs the risk of these children being labeled as “problems”



Step Two: Training Youth Leaders



Beginning *Challenges*...

- Church leaders face many challenges at the beginning stages of creating a place at the table for special needs youth
 - Lack of training
 - Lack of clear guidelines
 - Difficulty recruiting and developing quality volunteer leaders
 - The feeling of time drain and conflicting roles



More Beginning *Challenges*...

- Burnout of staff/volunteers who work with special needs kids
- “we work on one thing and another challenge crops up...”
- “you can identify people who have training [with special needs kids] but then they can get burnt out because they do this kind of work all week and then come to church and do it more.” Dave



Training Leaders

- Identify leaders who have experience with SWD
- Train leaders to train others in SWD



Training Leaders

- Leadership Team
- Guardian workshop
- Training youth to become leaders
- Training youth ministry interns



Training Leaders

- Training teachers to use engaged learning/active learning practices
 - Choosing the right curriculum
 - Multi-sensory
 - Team teaching
 - Pacing



Step Three: Creatively Working with Youth



Working with Youth

- Stay alert and observant



OR



- What is the function of the behavior?
 - To get attention
 - To avoid something (boredom)
 - Seek stimulation
 - Escape (hard work)



Typical Functions

- ADHD
 - avoid boredom, hard work
- AS
 - social acceptance, talk about special interest
- Tourette' s
 - Cope with anxiety or other strong feelings



Working with Youth

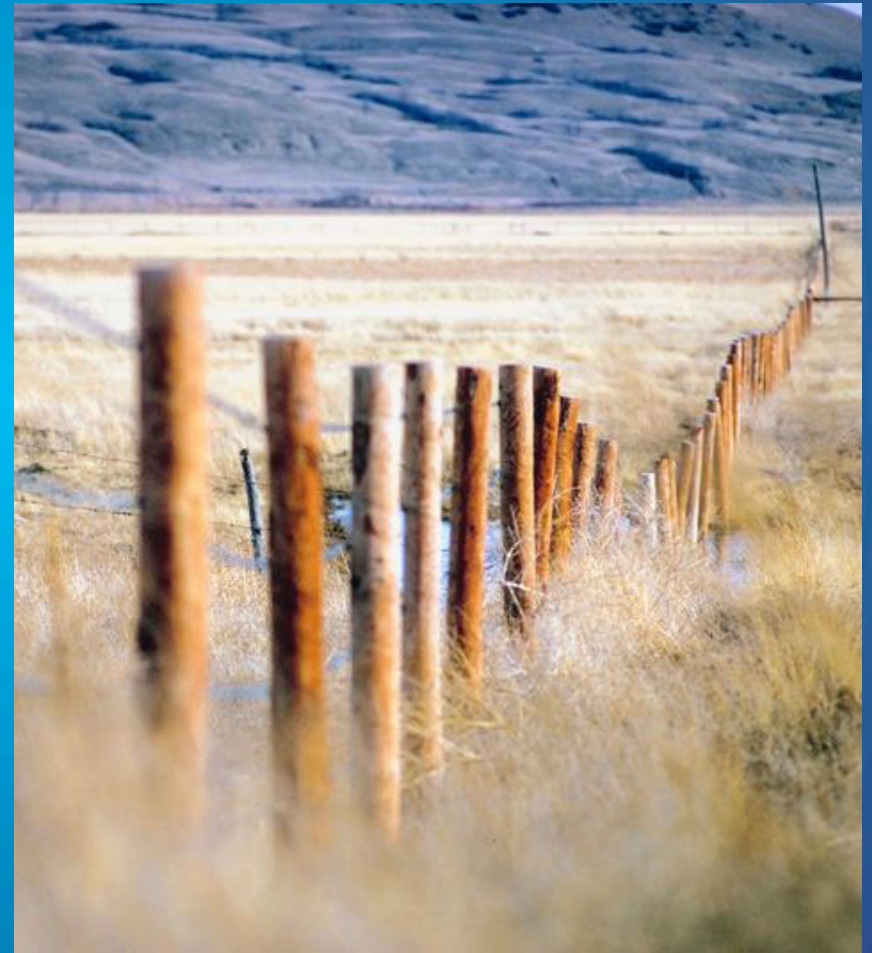
- Using engaged practices during youth group, retreats and mission trips
 - Constant supervision
 - Flexibility with work habits/jobs
 - Activities for down times
 - Talk about...interests
 - Keep volunteers as informed as possible
 - Encourage appropriate goofiness and regression
 - (some ADHD and AS youth function at 2/3 their age)





Small Group Setting

- Boundaries
 - Have you articulated your expectations or values?
 - How frequently do you articulate these expectations?
 - Where are these expectations posted?
 - How do you live these values





Small Group Setting

- Team Teaching
 - Consistent Teachers
 - Shared Values
 - Shared Expectations





Small Group Setting

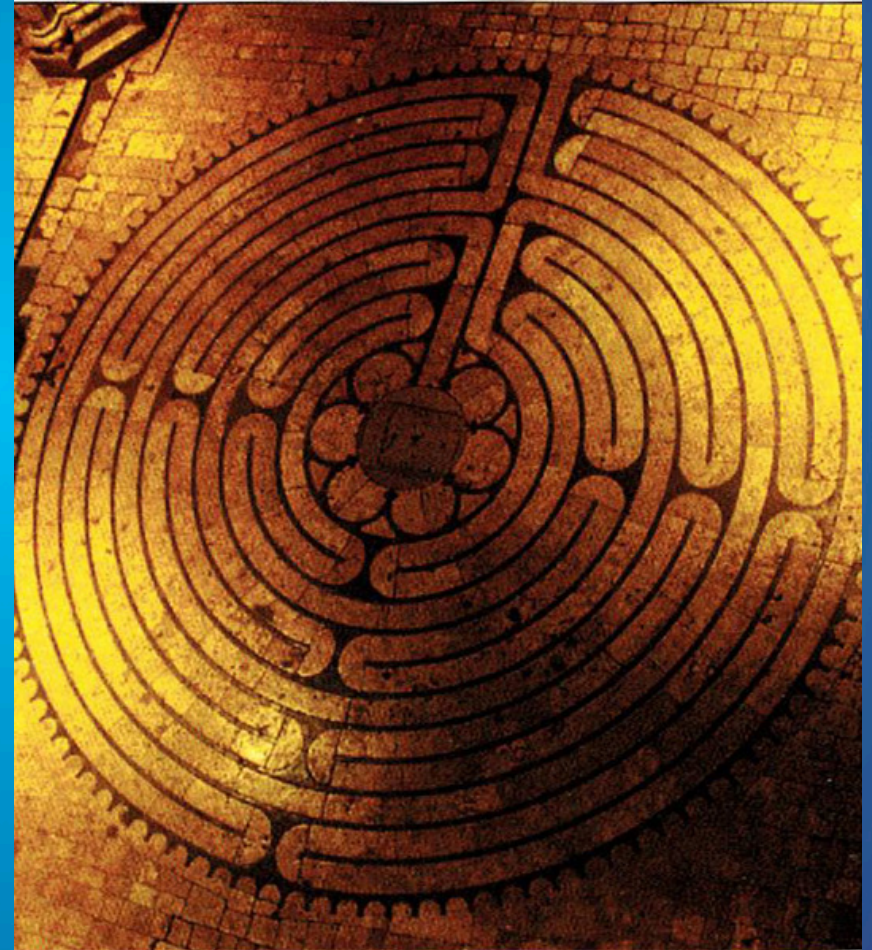
- Redirecting-
modifying or changing
a behavior.
 - What triggers the
behavior?
 - What is the new
behavior you want to
reinforce?





Small Group Setting

- Playing to Strength
 - How can you position a student to be successful?
- Be conscience of students weaknesses





Small Group Setting

- Rewards- seeking to reinforce positive behavior.
 - Don't make group rewards dependent on one students behavior





Small Group Setting

- Creativity
 - Movement
 - Variety of Activities
 - Learning Styles





Step Four: Working with Caregivers



Caregiver Involvement Research

- Success in the schools
 - “Over 20 years of research and experience has demonstrated that the education of children and disabilities can be made more effective by...strengthening the role of parents and ensuring that families of such children have meaningful opportunities to participate in the *education* of their children” (IDEA 1997)



Caregiver Involvement Challenges

- Volunteers are not trained to work collaboratively with parents and may feel reticent to discuss issues that come up during church activity
- Resentful of parenting practices
- Volunteers may feel that parents are responsible for their children's behavior problems and that they come to church for “babysitting,”
 - but Dave says,
“this may be true [that poor parenting contributes to the problem], but we are not here to judge; we are here to serve...the parents of these kids need a break; Jesus came not for those who are well, but for those who need a physician...”



Caregiver Involvement Challenges

High Expectations

- on volunteers
- on staff
- of time
- on a program
- on financial resources
- about their son/daughter “fitting in”

(Caregivers may not disclose important information about a student's disability)



Caregiver Involvement Successes

- Success is:
 - different in every case (each case needs to be treated individually)
 - found by asking a lot of questions and finding people who can answer them
- Success involves:
 - an open relationship
 - frequent contact



Caregiver Involvement Final Tip...

- Maintain appropriate boundaries



Final Step: Teaching Hospitality to Typical Youth

The challenges in a social
comparison society...



Resources

- Carter, E. W. (2007). *Including people with disabilities in faith communities: A guide for services, providers, families, & congregations*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.
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- Webb-Mitchell, B. (1994). *Unexpected guests at God's banquet: welcoming people with disabilities into the church*. NY: Crossroads.
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