Orange Conference 2023

Creating Inclusive Environments for Teenagers with Special Needs

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This is an example of a notes page that could be helpful for students to stay engaged during your large group lesson. These can be helpful for students who need something to do to stay focused.

Large Group Notes Limited Edition - Week #1

This Week's Schedule

Large Group Notes

5:45-6:00 p.m. - Hang Out

9 Square, Basketball, Card Games

6:00-6:30 p.m. - Dinner

Tacos

6:30-7:00 p.m - Game

Gaga Ball

7:00-7:15 p.m. - Worship

7:15-7:30 p.m. - Large Group

Llmited Edition - Week #1

7:30-8:00 p.m. - Small Groups

Scripture

Bottom Line

We are a

Take time to underline, circle, or star any words that might stand out, are confusing, or are meaningful.

Then God said, "Let us make humanity in our image to resemble us so that they may take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the earth, and all the crawling things on earth." God created humanity in God's own image, in the divine image God created them, male and female God created them.

(Genesis 1:26-27 CEB)

God saw everything he had made: it was supremely good

(Genesis 1:31a CEB).

Space to Doodle

Sensory Supports - Large & Small Group



Here's a list of items that might be helpful as you build out a sensory cart for your gathering space. You do not need to have a dedicated sensory space necessarily to provide supports for students with special needs. When these items are included in your environments, they can be helpful for many students and making them available to anyone can normalize their use.



Body SockUsed for Sensory Input,
Calming Space



Lycra Tube
Used for Sensory Input,
Small Group Time



Crash Mat
Used for Calming Space,
Sensory Input



Crazy CreekUsed for Alternative
Seating, Sensory Input



Visual TimerUsed for Transitioning



Weighted Lap Pad
Used for Sensory Input,
Focus



TangleUsed for Sensory Input,
Calming Space



Pocket DiscUsed for Turn Taking



HeadphonesUsed for Sensory Input



Marble Fidget
Used for Sensory Input,
Focus



Visual Schedule
Used for Transitions

Small Group Supports

Pro-Tips

Below are some tips that may be helpful to share with your small group leaders. Every student with special needs is different and these suggestions may not always work with students.

Check-in with the Parent/Caregiver Each Week

By sending a simple text, you may be able to gauge what might be best for your student. If it has been a rough day, that might leak over to your small group. Plan ahead and ask for support if needed. It also offers an incredible moment to see and encourage parents and caregivers.

Share the Schedule and Plan

Many students with special needs thrive when they know the schedule. This can be shared audibly at the top of programming either by a leader one-on-one or on stage, in writing on a large group notes page, or more formally through a visual schedule. If you do use a visual schedule, I would highly recommend using real pictures if that can work for a particular student. This elevates the more common graphically based images (also called PECS) and makes them more personal.

Create Social Stories around Small Groups

One strategy that can be helpful for students is to create a social story around attending small groups. Parents can use this as a tool to prepare a student for church and small groups. A sample social story can be found at the end of this section.

Establish Time to Share Personally

Many students with special needs benefit from a time set aside in your small group to share something personal. While sometimes this sharing can appear to be random, remember that they believed that whatever they shared was important enough to them to put it out there in their group. Having this time will allow you to redirect when they may want to share these things in the discussion part of your small group.

→ Visualize Turn Taking

During small group, use a visual signifier to help students know who has the floor to talk. A ball can be used. A knitted pocket frisbee is a really good option. It eliminates the fine motor skills it takes to catch a ball and therefore, it eliminates some of the distraction when someone misses. You can signify turn taking by establishing the rule that whoever has the object has the floor. This helps students wait their turn and establishes a bit of a rhythm to your discussions.

Small Group Supports

Pro-Tips

Below are some tips that may be helpful to share with your small group leaders. Every student with special needs is different and these suggestions may not always work with students.

Create Self-Advocates

Create a space where students can self advocate. Depending on the student, you may be able to allow a student to do a lap back and forth in a hallway if they get overwhelmed without asking. They can get up, leave the room, do a lap, and come back.

Make It Fun

Bring fun into your group. It might be easier to engage some students if you are doing something while discussing. Uno works as a simple game that can be played while discussing and many students will already know the rules. This engages them both socially and spiritually as you discuss. You may need to lay down some ground rules about focusing both on the game and the questions to make it work. You might also give everyone one turn and then ask a question to discuss.

Recognize the Purpose of Small Group

Small groups may have more of a dual purpose for students with special needs. Neurotypical students may have several other outlets for social interaction. For some students with special needs, your group may be one of the primary places they get to be with peers. Keep that in mind and leverage that purpose when you can. Just like some students begin to come to your ministry with friends, a student with special needs is no different. They are looking for those same social connections.

Make It Personal

Get to know that student. What are their passions and gifts? How can you leverage those in your group? Find ways for them to serve, contribute, and grow in the group. This may take some out of the box thinking, but the pay off is so worth it.

Be Patient

As with all students, these relationships take time. They may take more or less time depending on the student. Be patient with yourself as well. You probably aren't always going to get it right. The things that once worked may not work some nights or at all. You may need to go back to the drawing board AND that's ok. In fact, it shows that you are willing to fight to make sure this student has a place at the table.

Adaptations to Games

Pro-Tips

Below are some tips that might be helpful as you plan and execute games. There are a few sample games that follow that might be helpful to understand how these adaptations might play out in a game scenario.

Create ways to re-engage students who get out.

We all can agree that getting out sucks and staying out isn't fun. For students who struggle to regulate emotions or who feel big emotions, this can be so hard. Find ways to adapt the game to where a student can still engage in the game rather than sitting out.

Consider a student's motor skills.

Challenge yourself to adapt the game to make it so that student's who have a slower reaction time or may motor skill limitations can still be successful in a game. This might mean using a different ball that is slower, creating a safe zone, or adapting rules.

---> Encourage group play at times.

Teams or partners for some games might be beneficial. Consider how this might take the pressure off a student to "win" independently.

---> Plan for screen games.

When playing screen games, consider how a student might struggle with reading. Will that impact their ability to play the game? If so, consider how you might be able to adapt that.

Ask your students to create new rules or new ways to play.

Challenge your students and leaders to come up with new ways to play old games. This encourages our students and leaders to be creative, but it also might unleash a new way to adapt a game for your students with special needs.

Engage students who don't want to play.

Think about how you can encourage students who don't want to play. Are they able to collect and pass out supplies or equipment? Can they keep score? Would they enjoy helping keep the ball in play when it goes out of bounds? All of these could be ways to help them play without playing.

Sample Adapted Gym Game Ideas



Jedi Dodgeball

At the beginning of the round, teams will choose a Jedi and the goal is to keep this secret until they are hit for the first time. The Jedi will have a number of lives (3–5). Play your normal style of dodgeball, but instead of standing off to the side when they get out, students will sit down where they got out instead. The Jedi can tap them on the shoulder to get them back in. If the Jedi gets hit, you will announce how many lives the Jedi has left. When the Jedi runs out of lives, they have one more hit until they are out. When they get out, they can't get anyone else back in.

Jedi Dodgeball Adaptations - For some students, the emotionality of high energy games and getting out can lead to frustration. By adding in a way to get back in, this is addressed. For some groups, this simple adaptation can mean that everyone is involved and playing for the majority of the time.

Newcomb -

Newcomb plays a lot like volleyball in the structure. The out lines are the same as well as the rule allowing two passes. The primary difference is that you throw and catch the ball rather than bumping or setting it. Each team will take turns throwing the ball over the net. If they catch the ball, gameplay will continue. The team can do up to two passes and then throw the ball over. If the team doesn't catch it, the person who it lands closest to is out. If they do catch, they will continue play. A one-handed catch will get students back in via the order they got out.

Newcomb Adaptations - For students with mobility support needs and who may struggle with gross and fine motor skills, this is a great game. It combines the strategy of volleyball, but makes it more accessible by making catching the primary action. With the addition of the one handed catch to get others back in, it also allows a way to re-engage in the game.

Matball -

Matball is a version of kickball where runners can remain on a base as long as they want and the base can fill up with several runners. The rules are primarily like kickball except that the ball only has to land in front of home plate. This means that short kicks can often be very effective. Typically, the first and third bases only exist in this game, but could also be modified to include a second base. Without second base, the runners would be required to run from first to third. Runners can also continue running after scoring runs at home and would run from first to third.

Matball Adaptations - The elimination of forced outs allows for students to gauge when to advance to the next base. This typically helps students who may struggle with understanding the complexities of base running. The rule that allows anything that is past home plate actually can reward shorter kicks.

Sample Adapted Gym Game Ideas

Games

9-Square Adaptations - The game of 9-Square combines volleyball and traditional four square. There are several online tutorials that can give you playing directions. If you are looking to adapt the game, one of the easiest ways is switch the typical ball used for a beach ball. This forces players to slow the game and play with more finesse, but it also allows a student with slower motor reflexes to participate in a way that levels the playing field. Another way to adapt this game is to allow two people in each box as a team. This encourages some social interaction and allows the two partners to work together.

Gaga Ball -

Gaga ball is a fast-paced, high-energy game that is typically played in an octagonal pit. The objective of the game is to avoid being hit by the ball while trying to hit your opponents with it. Players can only hit the ball with their hands and can only get out if it hits them below the knee. If a player is hit by the ball, they are out, and the last person standing wins. Further rules can be found online.

Gaga Ball Adaptations - Defender Gaga Ball can be a good adaptation to a typical version of Gaga Ball. It assigns several players one or two panels (depending on group size) to guard. No one gets out, but points are added up for each hit taken on the panel. This allows group play over individual play and avoids scenarios where students get out.



Materials -

- Pens
- Scrap Paper or Post-It Notes
- Prompts given below for each person.

Set-Up - Set volunteers up in a shape like demostrated below. There will be five volunteers in each group. The flow of communication happens according the arrows. Only Person A will know the task. Person B serves as the middle man for all communication, but will not know the task. Person C, D, E will be able to communicate with Person B, but also will not know the task. Unless Person A intentionally discloses the task, the group will be clueless to what they should do.

Instructions - Using the prompts, complete the work ahead of you. Once your group has figured out the solution, have Person A give it to me. You may not pass notes written by someone else.

Person A

Can only communicate with Person B.

On their sheet of paper, they will have these instructions -

You may communicate with Person B. Find the symbol everyone has in common. You will submit your group's answer when you are done.

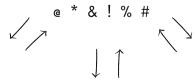


Person B

Can communicate with Person A, B, C, D, & E
On their sheet of paper, they will have these instructions –

You may communicate with Person A, C, D, E

Person C



Person E

Can only communicate with Person B
On their sheet of paper, they will have these instructions -

You may communicate with Person B

Can only communicate with Person B
On their sheet of paper, they will have these instructions –
You may communicate with Person B

!\$(#*^

Person D

% e!) ^ *

Can only communicate with Person B
On their sheet of paper, they will have these instructions You may communicate with Person B

Debrief -

Take time to explain who had what on their paper. Explain that Person A was the only one who knew the task. Discuss this with your group as it relates to students who have Autism and other special needs.

What was your role and what was this experience like for you?

If we imagine ourselves as volunteers and leaders being Person A, what does that mean for how we interact and lead students with special needs?

If we imagine our students with special needs being Person B, what are some of the parallels from this exercise that we can apply to their journey?

If we imagine our neurotypical students as being Person C, D, and E, what are some of the ways we can coach them in interacting with our students?

What are some of the ways that we can help students who experience being overwhelmed in our environments?



Take time to listen to the song, "Waiting for a Miracle" from Encanto and underline parts of the song that would resonate with students with special needs and their families.

Waiting for a Miracle Stephanie Beatriz

Don't be upset or mad at all Don't feel regret or sad at all Hey, I'm still a part of the family Madrigal And I'm fine, I am totally fine I will stand on the side as you shine I'm not fine, I'm not fine I can't move the mountains I can't make the flowers bloom I can't take another night up in my room Waiting on a miracle I can't heal what's broken Can't control the morning rain or a hurricane Can't keep down the unspoken invisible pain Always waiting on a miracle, a miracle Always walking alone Always wanting for more Like I'm still at that door longing to shine Like all of you shine All I need is a change All I need is a chance All I know is I can't stay on the side Open your eyes, open your eyes, open your eyes I would move the mountains Make new trees and flowers grow Someone please just let me know, where do I go? I am waiting on a miracle, a miracle I would heal what's broken Show this family something new Who I am inside, so what can I do? I'm sick of waiting on a miracle, so here I go I am ready, come on, I'm ready

I've been patient, and steadfast, and steady

When you gave us a miracle Am I too late for a miracle?

Bless me now as you blessed us all those years ago

How might our students with special needs and their families struggle in a church?

What gifts can these students and families bring?

How can our ministry include students with special needs?



Watch "Story of a Blrd" by Montague Workshop and Brad Montague. Take time to reflect on the students you have in your ministry or small group with special needs in light of the video.

Name of Student



What are their gifts? What can they show us?

"The birds had never thought to share."



What are their passions?

"I'm really into hip hop, laying down sick beats."



Who are their people?

"You're my friend. I have no reason to lie."



Watch the darts scene from Ted Lasso (https://youtu.be/5x0PzUoJS-U?t=124). Start at 2:04. Think about the assumptions you've made about students with special needs. Do some brainstorming to begin to ask questions and get curious about their journey.

"Be Curious, Not Judgmental."

Thinking of a particular student, I'm curious about this...

Thinking about parenting a student with special needs, I'm curious about this...

Thinking about the special needs journey, I'm curious about this...

"If they were curious, they would have asked questions."

I would ask our students with special needs these questions...

I would ask parents these questions...

I would ask teachers and others involved in the special needs community these questions...

Takeaway/Action Steps



This activity will help us recognize the power of our influence. Take time to identify two students (one with special needs and one without) that you know well. Identify key relationships for each person.

	Acquaintances (150 People)		
	Friends (50 People)	Student:	
	Good Friends (15 People)		
/ /	Core Group (3-5 pago/6)		
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	(150		
	Acquaintances (150 People)		
	Friends (50 People)	Student:	
	Good Friends (15 People)		
	Core Group (3-5 People)		
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Debrief Questions

What are some things you notice between the two sets of relationships? What is similar? What is different?
How might your church change the relational picture of a student with special needs?
How might this student's parents or caregivers have different relationships than those with neurotypical kids?
What can we do to continue to encourage our students and families on the special needs journey to build relationships rooted in Christ?



Read the poem by George Ella Lyon entitled, "Where I Am From." Take time to think about the poem below. Afterwards, brainstorm things about your childhood and upbringing that stick out to you. We'll write our own "Where I Am From" poems together.

Where I Am From

By George Ella Lyon

I am from clothespins,
from Clorox and carbon-tetrachloride.
I am from the dirt under the back porch.
(Black, glistening,
it tasted like beets.)
I am from the forsythia bush
the Dutch elm
whose long-gone limbs I remember
as if they were my own.

I'm from fudge and eyeglasses,
from Imogene and Alafair.
I'm from the know-it-alls
and the pass-it-ons,
from Perk up! and Pipe down!
I'm from He restoreth my soul
with a cottonball lamb
and ten verses I can say myself.

I'm from Artemus and Billie's Branch, fried corn and strong coffee. From the finger my grandfather lost to the auger, the eye my father shut to keep his sight.

Under my bed was a dress box spilling old pictures, a sift of lost faces to drift beneath my dreams. I am from those moments—snapped before I budded—leaf-fall from the family tree.

Items Around My House

Items Found in My Yard

Items Found in My Neighborhood

Names of Relatives

Sayings

Foods and Dishes

Places Memories Were Kept

Other



Write your own "Where I Am From" poem. Take your time. When everyone has been able to write something, share those with each other.

Where I Am From		
Ву	 	

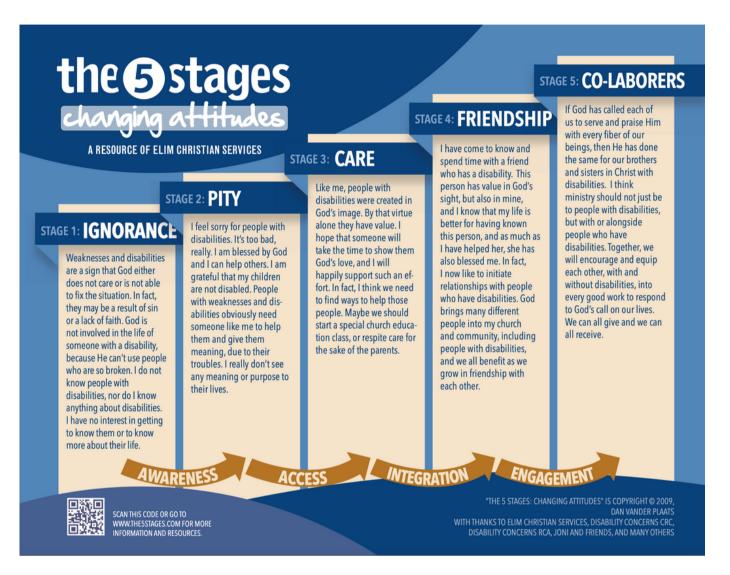


Consider these questions about this activity as you reflect on this activity. Consider both students with and without special needs.

How might a student with special needs have a poem that is different from our own? How does our background and story impact the way we engage with all students? What about students with special needs? Personally, do you need to address anything in your own story that could get in the way of serving and loving your few/our students? How might our ministry influence what would be included in a student's "Where I Am From" poem someday? What do we do with this information now?



This activity will help your ministry leaders and church assess their attitudes towards students with special needs. Take some time to read through each of the stages. Answer the questions following and discuss what this might mean for your ministry.



Which stage would you put yourself in currently? Why do you think that is?

Which stage would you say our church as a whole is in? Why do you think that?

How might our ministry lead up as we serve our students with special needs?

Forms - Intake for Students with Special Needs



Below is a sample intake form for parents to fill out as you welcome students with special needs into your ministry. Whatever you add or subtract, please remember that parents are filling out a lot of paper work and much of it is about what their child can't do. Take time to ask questions that center around hopes, dreams, passions, and interests too. You can ask simple questions on an intake form and then do a follow up phone call with the questions on the next page.

Sample Intake Form			
Student's Name:			
Parent/Caregiver's Names:			
E-mail:			
Graduation Year:			
What is your student's primary diagnosis?			
Why will our volunteers will LOVE hanging out v	with your student?		
What tips and hints would you share with a vol	unteer working with your student?		
What is one dream or goal would you have for	your student over the next year?		
What would you like your student to gain from	their time in our ministry?		
Anything else you would like to share with us a	ıbout your student?		

Forms - Intake for Students with Special Needs



Below are questions you can ask parents or caregivers when following up with a phone call after they've attended your programming. This is not a comprehensive list, but it can provide a good jumping off point for talking to parents or caregivers.

Family Questions

- How can we best support you as parents or caregivers? What would be helpful in your own spiritual journey?
- Tell me a little bit about your family. If the student has siblings, what can we do to support them as a sibling of a student with special needs but also as an individual?

Supports

- What types of supports does your student benefit from at school? If possible, which of those supports might be helpful to provide at church?
- What helps to redirect your student when needed?
- What types of things help your student release energy, calm anxiety, and assist when they are overwhelmed?

Skills and Gifts

- What are some skills, gifts, and passions that your student has? How might we help them use these skills, gifts, and passions in service to others?
- What types of skills are you working on at home that we can reiterate and reinforce here at church?
- What are some things your student loves to talk about?

Activities Outside of Church and People

- What do they like to do outside of church? Do they participate in any other activities or extracurriculars?
- Who are the important people in their life?

Personal Safety

• Are there any personal safety concerns that we should be aware of? What are some strategies that are effective in addressing those?

Prayer

• How can we be praying for you over the next few months?

Forms - Parent/Caregiver Communication Form



This is a sample communication form to document conversations you might have with a parent or caregiver about their student. This is helpful to keep track of behavior changes, successes, and other conversations with parents.

Student Name:		
Parent/Caregiver Na	me(s):	
	Communication Log	
Date:	Method:	
Action Steps:		
Date:	Method:	
Action Steps:		

Forms - Trip/Event Checklist for Parents



Brushing Hair Verbal Prompts Verbal Prompts Hand Over Hand Showering Deodorant Verbal Prompts Verbal Prompts Hand Over Hand Showering Deodorant Verbal Prompts Full Assistance (2 Adults) Notes Paily Programming Supports Wakes Up Early Closed Captioning No Flashing Lights Review Schedule Interpreter Provide Snacks Mobility Supports "Flat on Back" Time ADA Bathrooms Provide Quiet Spaces I:1 Support Uses Ear Muffs Meal Check-ins Provide Breaks Cther Supports Notes Notes Notes Notes Food Cut Up Food Allergies Encourage H2O	Name:		p:	
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	Special Diet Food Cut Up Food Allergies	Other Supports		Notes
	Other			

Forms - Caregiver Convos for Trips/Events



Name:	Trip:	
	·	
T		
Transportation To & From		

If riding with the group, what supports will make that more successful?

Examples: Are there any safety concerns you have? What things make road trips easier for your student?

If riding with parents, what can we do to make it feel like they are a part of the group?

Examples: Would you consider carpooling with us/making the same stops? Can we make them a trip basket for the car?

Activities of Daily Living Supports

What are some specific things for us to be mindful of around hygiene supports?

Examples: Are there certain routines they follow when going to bed or waking up? Are there any helpful tips we can pass on to our staff & volunteers? Do they shower every day/every other day?

How can we help you to encourage continued independence while on this trip?

Examples: Are there skills that you are working on at home that we can continue to work on while on this trip around hygiene?

How can we best protect their dignity while providing assistance?

Examples: Are there things that we can do to make sure that they are cared for in a way that honors them as a teenager/young adult?

Daily Programming Supports

What types of supports can we provide through scheduling that would be helpful?

Examples: Are there any things in the schedule that you think might be a difficulty for your student? How can we make shifts to provide things that would enhance your student's experience?

What are things that support your student if they get anxious or frustrated?

Examples: Is there an activity, a type of music, or something else that provides a sense of calm? What types of things work when redirecting them? What might be signs that they are getting anxious/frustrated?

What is your student really looking forward to?

Examples: What are some things they will enjoy? What do they hope to get out of this event? What are things that you hope they get out of this event?

What can we do to prepare them during the weeks leading up to the trip?

Examples: Are there social stories we can provide to help with them understanding what will happen during the trip? Can we show them an online video of where we are going?

Meal Times

Are there supports or foods that make meal times easier?

Examples: Is there a type of food your student loves? Does your student struggle with drinking enough water?

End with...

Thanks for trusting us with your student and allowing us to spend time with them during this trip. We appreciate you allowing us to be a part of your journey.

Forms - Organization Convos for Trips/Events

Admin

Organization: Contact:
History Serving Students with Special Needs How has your organization supported students with special needs in the past? What training does your staff receive on leading and including students with special needs? What are your organization's limitations in serving students with special needs? What have been both your joys and concerns in serving students with special needs?
Activities of Daily Living Supports Are there accessible shower facilities on site? If not, what are those accommodations like? What are the sleeping arrangements like? Are the sleeping arrangements flexible? Are there accessible restrooms in the sleeping areas? Around the facility?
How flexible is the schedule? Are we able to modify that or flex it for the needs? Are there quiet spaces for a student with special needs to go if needed? Is closed-captioning an option for videos and other media played during large group sessions? How should we prepare for sensory needs in large group sessions? (Flashing lights, ear muffs, etc.)? How involved are the staff in helping and leading our group? Are there any activities that would not be accessible to our students with special needs? Would I be able to take a tour of the facility to ensure it is a good fit for our students? Will groups interact together? If so, how can we prepare other groups for that interaction? What concerns do you have from a programmatic viewpoint?
Meal Needs What kind of special diets are you able to accommodate?
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