

## **Beginning a Special Needs Ministry in your Church: Ten Things to Consider**

by Collin Ingmire, Children's Ministry Director, Compass Church, Goodyear, AZ

For more information email [collini@compasschurch.info](mailto:collini@compasschurch.info)

1. **Start somewhere, even if it is a small way.** A specific challenge for us has been lack of classroom space. However, there are things we have been able to do outside of weekend programming to still serve and support families. One specific opportunity this summer was to participate in a Special Needs summer camp with a few other churches in our area.
2. **There is more than one way to train your Special Needs Ministry leaders.** Something I have been told multiple times is that when training your leaders, it cannot be done in just one way because every child is different and has unique needs. Consistently remind your team to be flexible!
3. **Include parents in the exciting happenings in your ministry.** One of the most rewarding parts about Children's Ministry is being able to celebrate spiritual victories with the child but also with the parents. In Special Needs Ministry, make this a priority!
4. **If a child or student has the desire/opportunity to serve within the church, find an opportunity for them.** Serving opportunities for children or students can vary. Maybe it is serving as a greeter and welcoming people. Helping the cleaning crew. Or maybe serving as a Leader's assistant in another Children's or Student Ministry classroom. Whatever it may be, it matters that they feel a part of their local church.
5. **Collaborate with other churches who also have a Special Needs Ministry.** No matter the size of church, find other churches in your community who currently have a Special Needs Ministry. This is a great way to learn from and encourage one another through the highs and lows of ministry.
6. **In the midst of challenges, strive to understand what a child loves and what their strengths are.** For every family/child I meet, I have them fill out a short form and this helps me understand what a child does not like, what to do when they get upset, but also what activities they enjoy doing and more.
7. **Are there resources/books available to learn more about Special Needs Ministry?** Yes, two resources I would highly recommend are: "Leading a Special Needs Ministry" by Amy Fenton Lee and "Exceptional Teaching: A Comprehensive Guide for Including Students with Disabilities" by: Jim Pierson. Both are available on Amazon.
8. **Promote the Special Needs Ministry within your church.** Do not feel that a Special Needs Ministry must be kept private or only made available to certain families within your church. As every other ministry does, this ministry is such a privilege and a joy to be a part of and people want to know about it.
9. **What are the most important supplies to have in a Special Needs Ministry classroom?** It ultimately depends on how much space you have, children's ages and what will best support them but a few supplies that are always beneficial are: Sensory items (objects that children can feel, hold onto, etc...), a CD player so that children could dance/sing along with music, coloring books, and building blocks.
10. **Always make sure a family knows that you care more about them and their child than a disability.** Every family and child will have different challenges and a different story, but all they truly desire is to be a part of a community where they can belong and feel loved!