



National Apostolate for
Inclusion Ministry

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Promoting the Full Participation of People with Intellectual/ Developmental Disabilities (IDD) in the Life of the Catholic Church

Tips for Working with Children and Youth with Special Needs

By Brigid O'Donnell

General Techniques

1. If you don't accomplish everything in the book, that's OK.
2. Be flexible. Depending on the day and the topic, you may need to change your approach.
3. Always check whether your child/youth understands what you're saying and doing.
4. Be gentle, but firm. Don't give in to temper or unwillingness to cooperate. If necessary, bring your student to the program director's office for a "breather."
5. Take short time-outs if necessary. Walk in the hall or get a drink.
6. If writing is a difficulty, have a discussion with the child/student and you do the writing.
7. Work near the rest of the group, not apart from it, unless absolutely necessary.

Non-Verbal Children/Youth

1. The individual may be absorbing more than s/he can relate back to you. Look for non-verbal clues, like a nod or shake of the head, an interest in what you're saying, a smile.
2. Ask simple questions that can be answered yes or no.
3. Use pictures and objects that the individual can point out to indicate s/he understands.
4. Have him/her draw a response or act it out.
5. Above all, don't be discouraged by a seeming lack of response. Just your presence means a great deal, even if s/he can't tell you.

Autistic Children/Youth

1. Be consistent. Have the same routine for greeting and proceeding in class.
2. Keep your language as simple as possible.
3. Use concrete objects and pictures when possible.
4. Use as many senses as possible: sight, smell, touch, hearing, and taste.
5. Repeat ideas, but vary the manner in which they are presented.
6. Some children/youth may use sign language.
7. Give recognition and praise for accomplishments whenever possible.
8. Help the individual work with others whenever possible.
9. Provide a quiet space if the individual becomes over stimulated.

Learning Disabled and ADHD Individuals

1. Many of the same techniques apply

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