



National Apostolate for
Inclusion Ministry

*Promoting the Full Inclusion of People with Intellectual or Developmental
Disabilities in the Life of the Catholic Church*

Tip Sheet for First Reconciliation

By Judith Sunder, NAFIM Board Member, RN & Parent

Being part of any sacramental preparation and ritual is important to us in our Catholic faith. Our participation makes us one with our faith community and the universal church. Recognizing that we are all equal and one in the eyes of God, sacramental celebrations should be made accessible to persons with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities (IDD). In doing so, a true sense of equality, inclusion, and oneness is present within our faith community.

To receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation a person with IDD needs to recognize or feel that they have done something wrong. Also, they must be able to have a sense of being sorry. A person with IDD may express sorrow in many forms. It may be expressed in words, shown in gestures (sign language) or expressed in body language (a hug or tears). A person who does not recognize that they have done something wrong or cannot experience even minimal contrition will not be able to participate in the individual Sacrament of Reconciliation. However, they may be able to appropriately participate in a communal penitential service.

The following is offered for the parent, religious education teacher and pastor or priest to assist a child or adult with Intellectual/ Developmental Disabilities prepare for the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Preparing the Person

1. Talk with the person about choices they make. Talk with them about the things they choose to do that makes God unhappy. Did they tease a friend? Did they fight with a sibling, friend, a coworker? Did they tell a story that wasn't true? Did they hit or hurt someone? Explain that when we do something bad we need to say that we are sorry to the person we hurt and to God. Explain that God forgives us when we say we are sorry for doing wrong.
2. If first reconciliation will be received with a religious education class, be sure that the religious education teacher is aware of any discussions with the priest and knows how to handle any behaviors that may come up.
3. A person who is not able to cope with a large group may benefit from making a first reconciliation at a time when there are fewer people in church
4. Speak frequently beforehand about reconciliation and where the sacrament takes place in the church. Pictures of a church and reconciliation room may help. Pictures of the specific church and reconciliation room can be even more helpful.
5. Take the person to church and show them the reconciliation room. Give them time in the room

REFERENCES

*Guidelines for the
Celebration of the Sacraments
with Persons with Disabilities
(1995) United States
Conference of Catholic
Bishops*

*Sacramental Preparation:
Eucharist- Individualizing
Lesson Plans (1996) Mary Pat
Carter and Marilyn E. Bishop,
The University of Dayton.*

*The Catechism of the Catholic
Church, Second Edition*



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6. Practice at home how they will act and act it out without them saying their sins. If possible, practice in the reconciliation room.
7. Show the person where they may go in church if they need a quiet place.
8. Teach a simple act of contrition: "I am sorry Jesus"; "I am sorry Jesus for doing wrong. With your help, I will try not to sin again"; signing "Sorry" can be sufficient.
9. Show and practice with the person what is expected after they leave the reconciliation room. If necessary, designate someone to meet them and assist them.

Preparing the Pastor or Priest

Before a person with IDD receives the sacrament for the first time, the parent or guardian, or teacher/helper should make an appointment to speak with the pastor and/or a trusted priest that the person can go to for reconciliation. Explain the person's desire to receive the sacrament. You may also want to explain why their participation in the sacrament is important to you.

Explain the person's disability to the priest and provide him with information that allows him to assist the person in the sacrament.

1. If someone has speech and language delays, provide the priest with a sheet of cues that can assist him in leading the person throughout the sacrament. For example, "Let's begin, In the Name....; Have you hurt anyone? Have you teased anyone? Have you fought with your sister and brother? Are you sorry for doing these things? Let's tell God we are sorry by saying....."
2. If someone uses a word or picture board, show and/or provide the priest with one. A picture board may demonstrate "I am sorry"; "I hurt"; a list of people, such as mom, dad, sister, brother, friend; "I am mad at...."
3. Ask the priest to keep language as simple as he can.
4. Instruct the priest on how you handle the person's behaviors if they become excited or agitated.
5. Tell the priest if the person has a tendency to exit a room when they become upset or frustrated and to allow them to do so.
6. Identify with the priest a safe and/or quiet place the person can go if they need to (foyer, a family or cry room)
7. If a person uses a sign or gesture to express sorrow show the priest what those are.
8. Let the priest know you have taught the person a simple prayer of sorrow.

NAfIM

P.O. Box 218
Riverdale, MD 20738

phone: 800.736.1280
email: qnafim@aol.com

www.nafim.org