

CATECHESIS FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

A Handbook for Parish Leaders



Presented by

Office of Family Catechesis / Parish Leadership Support
Diocese of Phoenix

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The Roman Catholic
Diocese of Phoenix

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Dear Pastors and Parish Leaders,

The Office of Family Catechesis is pleased to present this handbook for catechesis with children with disabilities, as a resource to assist pastors and parish leaders. Through this resource, we hope to assist parishes to become places where those with disabilities can receive catechesis, and their families are supported.

Many thanks to those people without whom this handbook would not exist. MaryBeth Mueller provided the initial inspiration and invaluable guidance throughout the entire process. Sr. Maria Madre de la Sabiduría, SSVM, chaired the handbook writing committee. Dr. Guadalupe McGettigan, Suzanne Oliver, Donna Macia, Christine Porter, AnneMarie Kresge, and Fran Kennedy provided submissions for the handbook and exhaustively edited the handbook drafts. Throughout the final editing process, many parish leaders from across the valley offered excellent feedback and assistance throughout the revision process. We are grateful for their time and their valuable perspective, which helped share the final product. Ambria Hammel of *The Catholic Sun* edited, formatted and organized the handbook you have today. Our deepest thanks and gratitude go to these many individuals for their work. Thank you, and may God reward you!

Ultimately all catechesis is the work of the Holy Spirit, and we are privileged to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in the work of sharing Christ with others. The Lord Jesus Christ said, “He who welcomes a little child in my name, welcomes me.” May this work help us to understand, love, and welcome ALL children in our midst as we serve them in God’s name.

Very sincerely yours in Christ,

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PREFACE

The Diocese of Phoenix Office of Family Catechesis/Parish Leadership Support is pleased to present this handbook on catechetical formation for children with disabilities. This handbook, which is the work of many dedicated professionals, is an effort to assist parishes to better lead children with disabilities and their families to the graces of the sacraments and to fully participate in the life of the Church to the extent they are able.

“One of the fundamental truths of Christian belief is that each human being is created in the image and likeness of God”
-Genesis 1:26-27

“The Catholic Church unconditionally embraces and faithfully proclaims this truth. It is the foundation for human dignity. Our commitment to this truth is measured through actions on behalf of the vulnerable and alienated in society, especially the poor and suffering.”

-Nebraska Bishop’s Conference
January 2005

Yet much more can still be done to fully recognize and embrace people with disabilities of all ages to the Church, as well as to help them to live out their vocations as sons and daughters of God who are called to holiness.

“Those whose lives are diminished or weakened deserve special respect. Sick or handicapped persons should be helped to lead lives as normal as possible.”
-Catechism of the Catholic Church 2276

Great strides have been made to assist those with disabilities to live as fully integrated, productive members of society and to utilize their gifts to serve the community. We look on the efforts of the past several decades, with gratitude for the increasing recognition of the gifts that persons with disabilities bring to society in general and to the Church in particular. In discussing how to better welcome and include persons with disabilities in the Church, a grave disservice is done if their spiritual needs are not considered. By virtue and grace of baptism these boys and girls, are called to live lives of holiness and ultimately to become saints. The Church has the particular mission to assist all souls to answer God’s call, grow in



holiness, and live their vocation. This is true of those with disabilities, regardless of the type or severity of that disability.

Indeed, far from being a burden, people with disabilities help us to be more fully human, and to advance in holiness. They are a challenge to the self-complacent, utilitarian world that “often perceives (the disabled) as a shame or a provocation and their problems as burdens to be removed or resolved as quickly as possible. **Disabled people are, instead, living icons of the crucified Son. They reveal the mysterious beauty of the One who emptied himself for our sake and made himself obedient unto death. It is said that disabled people are humanity's privileged witnesses. They can teach everyone about the love that saves us; they can become heralds of a new world by love, solidarity and acceptance,** a new world transfigured by the light of Christ, the Son of God who became incarnate, who was crucified and rose for us.” (St. Pope John Paul II, [International Symposium on the Dignity and Rights of the Mentally Disabled Person](#), Jan. 2004)

People with disabilities or a sensitivity to them often model holiness. Some have even achieved sainthood. Among those who come to mind:

- [Blessed Margaret of Castello](#), who was blind and crippled, cast off by her wealthy parents and lived the rest of her life on the streets. Today she is the patron of the poor, disabled, and unwanted.
- [St. Germaine Cousin](#), who suffered from physical impairments, including boils and a swollen hand. She was mistreated by her family, lived a holy life and is now canonized.
- [St. Joseph of Cupertino](#), a terrible student who was sickly, inattentive, and distracted, is the patron of those with [intellectual disabilities](#) (see page 60).
- [St. Francis de Sales](#), who is the patron of the [deaf and those who are hard of hearing](#) (see page 48), due to his holy ministry with deaf persons.
- [St. Lucy](#), who is venerated as the [patron of the blind](#) (see page 50) and those with vision problems.



St. Germaine was sickly and forced to sleep in the barn. She attended Mass daily with God protecting her flock while at Mass and parting a swollen river to help her arrive on time.

To these, and countless other holy men and women of God, do we entrust the children of the Diocese of Phoenix who are living with disabilities. Our prayer and hope for them is that they too attain holiness and one day become saints in heaven!

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops describes [six foundational tasks of catechesis](#) that “constitute a unified whole by which catechesis seeks to achieve its objective: the formation of disciples of Jesus.” (NDC, no. 20)

- 1) **Promotion of knowledge of the Faith**
- 2) **Promotion of liturgical worship and participation in the sacramental life of the Church**

- 3) **Integration of moral formation into a Christian way of life**
- 4) **Teaching to pray in Christ, with Christ, and in communion with the Church**
- 5) **Initiation into the life of the local church community and active participation in the life of the Church**
- 6) **Promotion of a missionary spirit to witness to Christ in society**

These six tasks are the goals of all catechetical formation. So, true catechetical inclusion for children with disabilities will not neglect forming these children to the extent of their capacity in all six aspects of catechesis. Thus, children with disabilities can truly become disciples of Jesus Christ. Regardless of disabilities, all children and indeed all people are called to live a life of prayer, in witness to Christ, as active members of the Christian community.

The Holy Father, Pope Francis, reminds us:

"The way we experience illness and disability is an index of the love we are ready to offer. The way we face suffering and limitation is the measure of our freedom to give meaning to life's experiences, even when they strike us as meaningless and unmerited. Let us not be disturbed, then, by these tribulations. We know that in weakness we can become strong and receive the grace to fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ for his body, the Church."

-Pope Francis

[Jubilee for the Sick and Persons with Disabilities](#)

June 2016

In a special way, this handbook focuses on providing practical information to assist parishes in the planning and implementation of sacramental preparation and ongoing catechetical formation for children with disabilities and special needs. It is hoped that:

- further resources are developed to assist parishes with providing for the spiritual, catechetical, and community needs of adults with disabilities as well. For the time being, a comprehensive list of national and local resources for persons with disabilities is provided in the handbook.
- these resources can be used to assist parish leaders to adapt existing programs, begin new programs, and to help the parish become a place where young Catholics with disabilities grow in faith and are fully included in the sacramental life of the Church.

"Evangelization and catechesis for persons with disabilities must be geared in content and method to their particular situation. However, care should be taken to avoid further isolation of persons through these programs which, as far as possible, should be integrated with the normal catechetical activities of the parish."

-U.S. Catholic Bishops

Pastoral Statement on Persons with Disabilities

THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE CHILD WITH DISABILITIES

The child with disabilities has the same spiritual needs as the rest of us; however, this child requires a little extra help in nurturing his or her relationship with God. In giving this assistance to the child, there are a few points we must remember.

As adults, sometimes we try to form a child, give them what we think they need and then we want to see the results of “our” work. We must remember that we are simply presenting our faith to the child and we must step back and let God do His work. We are indirect masters, the unworthy servant of the Direct Master, who is God. The Holy Spirit does the actual teaching during contemplative time given the child. This is also true for a child without special needs.

As a child develops in physical stages from a child, to an adolescent, and then an adult, we can see these stages visibly. Spiritually, we cannot see the stages as they develop, and as adults, we need to remember that the inside, the spiritual part, belongs to the child alone and we should not trespass there. Only God sees our hearts. We cannot know the relationship that is developing between God and the child. If you ask the child, he cannot express it, but there is a deep bond between the child and God that cannot be explained as the result of any human work, and no person should interfere. For example, if a child is asked what he or she learned in the catechetical session, a likely answer might be “nothing” or “I don’t know.” In reality, it may be that the child cannot verbalize what is happening in his soul. There are times when God allows us to see that He is working in the child. We might see it in a drawing, in something the child says or does, or in a prayer. It is not us teaching the child; it is God.

The child with intellectual disabilities would benefit from visuals, such as pictures of what they hear in the Scripture. It is best if they are pictures of real people, or maybe paintings. A diorama with figures would also be helpful so they can remember the Scripture as they move the figures. The child also needs silence to process what is happening in the depth of his or her soul. Indeed, most children desire that quiet contemplative time and some are deeply disturbed when this time is interrupted.

The educator Maria Montessori initially worked with children with special needs. She discovered how intelligent these children can be. When she proceeded to develop her educational program for children of normal intelligence, she discovered that some of them can be slower to learn than special needs children. Although we know that a child with disabilities is not necessarily unintelligent, we need to keep in mind that we cannot measure spirituality. Ultimately, the Holy Spirit knows what is happening in the soul of each child. We are simply God’s tool, and must trust Him to bring about fruit in the child’s soul, although we are unable to see with our eyes the changes wrought by grace.

“We are a single flock under the care of a single shepherd. There can be no separate Church for persons with Disabilities.”

*-U.S. Catholic Bishops
Welcome and Justice for Persons with Disabilities*

Section I

SACRAMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Holy Father Pope Francis has spoken eloquently many times on the rights of those with disabilities. “We are called to reach out to those who find themselves in the existential peripheries of our societies and to show particular solidarity with the most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters: the poor, the disabled, the unborn and the sick...” ([2013 World Council of Churches Message](#))

There are many considerations for a pastor and his designee when a child with disabilities presents himself at the parish for the reception of sacraments. Not infrequently, catechetical leaders are uncertain of the process, or question how to evaluate the ability to receive catechetical instruction. If this sounds like you, [take special note of Section II](#) (starting on page 18) plus [samples in the Appendix](#) portion of this handbook (*see page 88*).

It is helpful to understand how the Church considers those with disabilities:



- Christ said, “Let the little children come to me.”
- The Church has urged parents to properly catechize their children, as part of their baptismal right.
- The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has declared, “Disability alone does not disqualify a person from receiving the sacraments. Cases of doubt should be resolved in favor of the right of the baptized person to receive the sacrament.” (*Guidelines for the Celebration of Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities* 20)

In the following pages, we will examine how to best prepare catechetical material for a child with disabilities, and how to prepare for sacramental reception.

The following guidance comes from:

- the Code for Canon Law
- the Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities
- the Catechism of the Catholic Church

and is provided to give context to the sacramental preparation and celebration within the law of the Church, the teaching of the Church, and the statements of the United States Bishops. These quick references can guide pastors and parish leaders in unfamiliar catechetical situations with children who have disabilities.

Once the child has been evaluated, and appropriate arrangements made for catechetical instruction and sacramental preparation, additional accommodations may be needed.

Further questions can be referred to the [Office of Family Catechesis](#) at (602) 354-2321.

*Each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed.
Each of us is loved. Each of us is necessary.*

-Pope Benedict XVI

FULL INITIATION OF THE CHILD WITH DISABILITIES

At times, a child with disabilities who is over the age of seven and has never been baptized may be presented for full initiation into the Church. Each case is unique and there is no one answer that can fit all circumstances. In such instances, the [Office of Family Catechesis](#) may be consulted.

BAPTISM AND THE CHILD WITH DISABILITIES

- “Sacred ministers cannot deny the sacraments to those who seek them at appropriate times, are properly disposed, and are not prohibited by law from receiving them. Pastors of souls and other members of the Christian faithful, according to their respective ecclesiastical function, have the duty to take care that those who seek the sacraments are prepared to receive them by proper evangelization and catechetical instruction, attentive to the norms issued by competent authority.” (*Code of Canon Law*, 843)
- “For an adult to be baptized, the person must have manifested the intention to receive baptism, have been instructed sufficiently about the truths of the faith and Christian obligations, and have been tested in the Christian life through the catechumenate. The adult is also to be urged to have sorrow for personal sins.” (*Code of Canon Law*, 865)
- Individuals with severe cognitive impairment, whether they have achieved the age of discretion (also known as the age of reason) or not, may be baptized since such individuals at any age are equivalent to infants. In such cases, the consent of one parent or guardian is required, provided that the individual is brought up in the Catholic faith. (cf *Code of Canon Law*, 864-868)
- All individuals, regardless of disability, can be admitted to the Sacrament of Baptism.

“Because it is the sacrament of universal salvation, baptism is to be made available to all who freely ask for it, are properly disposed, and are not prohibited by law from receiving it.

Baptism may be deferred only when there is no reason for hoping that the person will be brought up in the Catholic religion. Disability, of itself, is never a reason for deferring

baptism. Persons who lack the use of reason are to be baptized provided at least one



parent or guardian consents to it.” (*Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*, 9)

- Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission: “Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration through water in the word.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1213)

HELPFUL TIPS DURING THE LITURGY

- With input from the child’s family and catechist, decide on the best placement for the child during the Mass. The best place may be right in front or close to the front. It is almost always best for a child with a disability to sit on the end of the pew in case they need to step out for a break.
- In the case where children are not typically sitting with their parents during a liturgy to receive sacraments (eg, during the Confirmation/first Communion liturgy), it may be necessary to allow a parent of a child with a more severe disability to sit with their child during the Mass.
- In extreme cases, a child may not be able to tolerate a crowded and long liturgical celebration. Discuss with the pastor if a child with a severe disability can be baptized or receive his or her Confirmation and first Communion at a regularly scheduled, quieter Mass, such as an evening or Saturday morning Mass.



CONFIRMATION AND THE CHILD WITH DISABILITIES

- “Every baptized person not yet confirmed and only such a person is capable of receiving confirmation. To receive confirmation licitly outside the danger of death requires that a person who has the use of reason be suitably instructed, properly disposed, and able to renew the baptismal promises.” (*Code of Canon Law*, 889)
- “The faithful are obliged to receive this sacrament at the proper time. Parents and pastors of souls, especially pastors of parishes, are to take care that the faithful are properly instructed to receive the sacrament and come to it at the appropriate time.” (*Code of Canon Law*, 890)
- “The sacrament of confirmation is to be conferred on the faithful at about the age of discretion unless the conference of bishops has determined another age, or there is danger of death, or in the judgment of the minister a grave cause suggests otherwise.” (*Code of Canon Law*, 891)



- “Every baptized person not yet confirmed can and should receive the sacrament of Confirmation. Since Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist form a unity, it follows that ‘the faithful are obliged to receive this sacrament at the appropriate time,’ for without Confirmation and Eucharist, Baptism is certainly valid and efficacious, but Christian initiation remains incomplete.
For centuries, Latin custom has indicated ‘the age of discretion’ as the reference point for receiving Confirmation...
Although Confirmation is sometimes called the ‘sacrament of Christian maturity,’ we must not confuse adult faith with the adult age of natural growth, nor forget that the baptismal grace is a grace of free, unmerited election and does not need “ratification” to become effective.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1306, 1308)
- “Persons who because of developmental or mental disabilities may never attain the use of reason are to be encouraged either directly or, if necessary, through their parents or guardian, to receive the sacrament of confirmation at the appropriate time.” (*Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*, 16)

HELPFUL TIPS DURING THE LITURGY

- With input from the child's family and catechist, decide on the best placement for the child during the Mass. The best place may be right in front or close to the front. It is almost always best for a child with a disability to sit on the end of the pew in case they need to step out for a break.
- In the case where children are not typically sitting with their parents during a liturgy to receive sacraments (eg, during the Confirmation/first Communion liturgy), it may be necessary to allow a parent of a child with a more severe disability to sit with their child during the Mass.
- In extreme cases, a child may not be able to tolerate a crowded and long liturgical celebration. Discuss with the pastor if a child with a severe disability can be baptized, confirmed or even receive his **or** her first Communion at a regularly scheduled, quieter Mass, such as an evening or Saturday morning.

HOLY COMMUNION AND THE CHILD WITH DISABILITIES

- “Any baptized person not prohibited by law can and must be admitted to Holy Communion.” (*Code of Canon Law*, 912)
- “The administration of the Most Holy Eucharist to children requires that they have sufficient knowledge and careful preparation so that they understand the mystery of Christ according to their capacity and are able to receive the body of Christ with faith and devotion. The Most Holy Eucharist, however, can be administered to children in danger of death if they can distinguish the body of Christ from ordinary food and receive communion reverently.” (*Code of Canon Law*, 913)
- “It is primarily the duty of parents and those who take the place of parents, as well as the duty of pastors, to take care that children who have reached the age of discretion are prepared properly and, after they have made sacramental confession, are refreshed with this divine food as soon as possible. It is for the pastor to exercise vigilance so that children who have not attained the use of reason or whom he judges are not sufficiently disposed do not approach holy communion.” (*Code of Canon Law*, 914)
- Parents and pastors “are to see to it that children who have reached the age of reason are correctly prepared and are nourished by the Eucharist as early as possible. Pastors are to be vigilant lest any children come to the Holy Banquet who have not reached the age of reason or whom they judge are not sufficiently disposed. **It is important to note, however, that the criterion for reception of holy communion is the same for persons with developmental and mental disabilities as for all persons, namely, that the person be able to distinguish the Body of Christ from ordinary food, even if this recognition is evidenced through manner, gesture, or reverential silence rather than verbally.** Pastors are encouraged to consult with parents, those who take the place of parents, diocesan personnel involved with disability issues, psychologists, religious educators, and other experts in making their judgment. If it is determined that a parishioner who is disabled is not ready to receive the sacrament, great care is to be taken in explaining the reasons for this decision. Cases of doubt should be resolved in favor of the right of the baptized person to receive the sacrament. The existence of a disability is not considered in and of itself as disqualifying a person from receiving the Eucharist.” (*Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*, 20)



HELPFUL TIPS FOR CATECHISTS

- Children with cognitive impairments or autism will need additional time to practice.
- Role playing is beneficial when preparing to receive Holy Eucharist.
- Children with sensory issues may need to get used to the texture and taste of the host. In these cases, begin practicing with a small part of the unconsecrated host and build up to consuming an entire host.
- In some instances, an individual may never be able to tolerate consuming a whole host due to a sensory impairment or a physical disability. It is acceptable for an individual to receive only part of the host. It is also permissible for an individual to receive only the Precious Blood if necessary. **These special situations should be discussed and arranged with the pastor.**
- If the child can independently approach the priest to receive Holy Communion, then this should be fostered, communicating to the child that he or she is trusted and competent to approach the altar of our Lord with confidence and reverence.
- If the child, due to a physical disability or interfering behavior, is unable to independently approach the priest, the accompanying person should take care to remain outside of the child's sacred space while also ensuring proper reception of the sacred species.

HELPFUL TIPS DURING THE LITURGY

- With input from the child's family and catechist, decide on the best placement for the child during the Mass. The best place may be right in front or close to the front. It is almost always best for a child with a disability to sit on the end of the pew in case they need to step out for a break.
- In the case where children are not typically sitting with their parents during a liturgy to receive sacraments (eg, during the Confirmation/first Communion liturgy), it may be necessary to allow a parent of a child with a more severe disability to sit with their child during the Mass.
- In extreme cases, a child may not be able to tolerate a crowded and long sacrament Mass. **Discuss with the pastor** if a child with a severe disability can be baptized, confirmed or even receive his or her first Communion at a regularly scheduled, quieter Mass, such as an evening or Saturday morning.

RECONCILIATION AND THE CHILD WITH DISABILITIES

- “To receive the salvific remedy of the sacrament of Penance, a member of the Christian faithful must be disposed in such a way that, rejecting sins committed and having a purpose of amendment, the person is turned back to God.” (*Code of Canon Law*, 987)
- “A member of the Christian faithful is obliged to confess in kind and number all grave sins committed after baptism and not yet remitted directly through the keys of the Church nor acknowledged in individual confession, of which the person has knowledge after diligent examination of conscience. It is recommended to the Christian faithful that they also confess venial sins.” (*Code of Canon Law*, 988)
- “Only those who have the use of reason are capable of committing serious sin. Nevertheless, even young children and persons with mental disabilities often are conscious of committing acts that are sinful to some degree and may experience a sense of guilt and sorrow. As long as the individual is capable of having a sense of contrition for having committed sin, even if he or she cannot describe the sin precisely in words, the person may receive sacramental absolution.

Those with profound mental disabilities, who cannot experience even minimal contrition, may be invited to participate in penitential services with the rest of the community to the extent of their ability...In the case of individuals with poor communication skills, sorrow for sin is to be accepted even if this repentance is expressed through some gesture rather than verbally.



In posing questions and in the assignment of penances the confessor is to proceed with prudence and discretion, mindful that he is at once judge and healer, minister of justice as well as of mercy.” (*Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*, 23, 25)

HELPFUL TIPS FOR CATECHISTS

- Children with disabilities will need additional time to practice.
- It is helpful to role play repeatedly with pretend “sins”. Use modeling, hand-over-hand assistance, and repetition until a child can go through the steps on his or her own, to the extent he or she is able.
- When there are many children present for First Penance at one time, it is helpful to arrange for a child with disabilities to go first or early on so they do not have to wait too long. Many children with attention deficits, behavioral disorders, autism, or intellectual disabilities may have difficulty waiting and transitioning. They may lose focus, become anxious, or grow tired from the amount of effort put into keeping it together in a stressful environment.
- For some children, making their First Penance in a big group might be too stressful. In this case, arrange for the child to do his or her first Confession at a separate time, either during a regular parish Confession time or by appointment.

Section II

CATECHETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

“In Christ's name, the Church is committed to making herself more and more a ‘welcoming home.’ We know that the disabled person — a unique and unrepeatable person in his equal and inviolable dignity — needs not only care, but first of all love.”

*-St. Pope John Paul II
Jubilee Year 2000*

This gentle challenge to make the Church a “more welcoming home” is one that each parish needs to discern and answer according to the best of their abilities and resources. It is certain that people with disabilities are present within the parish community. According to the United States Department of Education, 13% of students enrolled in school for the 2012-2013 school year received special education services. Pastors and parish leaders should expect that there are children with disabilities in need of catechetical instruction and should prepare the parish to include these children.

There are many measures that need to be taken to identify a parish’s needs, and to prepare to serve children with disabilities in a parish catechetical program. This handbook will look at each of them in-depth:

- Networking with parishioners who have knowledge and experience in the field of disabilities. They would likely embrace the opportunity to advise and/or help.
- Gathering information regarding children with disabilities in the parish
- Determining how to best serve each student
- Finding and training volunteers
- Making logistical preparations for the classroom environment

GENERAL PEDAGOGY TIPS

These tips will help all children to learn, regardless of disability.

- Be patient!
- Be informed; take time to understand the disability.
- Take time to know the children, speak to them directly and make eye contact.
- Allow the children time to respond to questions.
- Allow the children to speak without interruption, even if it takes a while to formulate their thoughts.
- Be a good listener. Acknowledge you understood what they said.
- Be accepting of children with special needs in the classroom, out of the classroom, and in the Church.

PARISH NETWORKING WITH DISABILITIES EXPERTS

One of the most helpful steps that can be taken to serve children with disabilities in a parish is to seek parishioners who have experience working with individuals with disabilities. These people may include special education teachers or aides, therapists, habilitation providers, parents or others.

These professionals can help:

- meet with families
- assess students
- work with children in catechesis
- advise on issues (e.g., assessing the needs of children with particular disabilities, setting up a classroom for children with disabilities, and deciding what kind of materials are beneficial to use)

You can seek people who have this experience by placing announcements in the bulletin or through a short announcement at Mass (examples can be found in the [Appendix](#) (see page 87)). These individuals can be an excellent resource to assist your parish with many different facets of the ministry to those with disabilities. Potentially, one of these individuals could be a good option to initiate or coordinate a disability ministry. You may find that there are many such professionals within your parish community, who are skilled and experienced in various facets of special needs and disabilities, who can be of great assistance. Attempt to identify these persons, and enlist their assistance.

It also bears mentioning that parishes may need the assistance of translators and interpreters or bilingual assistants to best aid parishioners with disabilities. Experienced interpreters (whether formally trained or not) could be an excellent asset.



STEPS FOR INCLUSION

It is important to remember that each child presents a unique situation, including different strengths, difficulties and needs. Therefore, two children with the same disability may benefit from different strategies. The following processes can help evaluate each child's individual needs and how to best address them.

“Evangelization and catechesis for persons with disabilities must be geared in content and method to their particular situation. However, care should be taken to avoid further isolation of persons through these programs which, as far as possible, should be integrated with the normal catechetical activities of the parish.”

*-U.S. Catholic Bishops
Pastoral Statement on Persons with Disabilities*

1 DISCERN FAMILY AND CAREGIVER SUPPORT

“The family is the place par excellence where the gift of life is received,” [declared St. Pope John Paul II to Congress in 1999](#). “When children are more vulnerable and exposed to the risk of being rejected by others, it is the family that can most effectively safeguard their dignity, equal to that of healthy children. It is clear that in these situations families faced with complex problems have the right to support. Hence the importance of people who can be close to them, whether they are friends, doctors or social workers...It is important that the problem be shared not only with close relatives, but also with qualified persons and friends.”

These wise observations underscore the importance of community and support for the family of a child with special needs. Parish staff and volunteers should be aware that in ministering to a child with a disability, it is important to support the family and caregivers of the child as well. Providing parents, other caregivers, and even siblings an opportunity to gather together can help them to not feel isolated but instead feel understood. Family members can enjoy fellowship and share struggles, strategies, and successes with others who understand what it is like to love a child with a disability. Pastors and parish leaders are encouraged to seek out pastoral ways to support the family in the extra challenges that come with caring for a child with special needs.

*“Priests can work with the whole family.
Give the family support with prayers and
talk to them to see what they need. Please
talk to us and our parents. Show love by
giving support to the family.*

*-18-year-old with autism
Parishioner of Our Lady of Joy*

In addition, the families share the same faith in Jesus Christ, and can mutually support each other in the faith throughout difficult times. [St. Pope John Paul II declared](#), “It is above all in prayer that the family will find the strength to face difficulties. By constantly turning to the Lord, families will learn how to welcome, love and appreciate the child who is marked by suffering.” Parishes would do well to consider how they can help parents to gather together in community and in prayer.

A solution for many parishes has been the creation of a support group for families of children with disabilities as a parish ministry. While there are many good support groups within the larger community, a parish support group can offer support in areas such as attending Mass, family faith life, and morality issues that may not be addressed by the secular support group. It also allows members to use prayer to lift each other up. The opportunity for families to meet can be provided during class time or at another time if that is more convenient. Consider starting a support group, or encouraging parents to start their own support group.

Parish awareness is vital to successfully start and maintain a ministry for those with disabilities. In addition to recruiting the ministry partners, it is important for the parents to know this ministry exists. Making it known that children with disabilities are welcome may help parents to feel comfortable joining the catechetical program and sharing important information about their child's needs. Without this invitation, some parents may be hesitant to have their children participate in catechetical programs for fear that they will not be accepted, will be misunderstood by teachers, will be teased by other children, or will not benefit from it.

Also note that some parents:

- May register their child but be reluctant to mention their child's disability for fear that their child will be rejected from the program. This leads to difficulties as the catechist struggles to understand how to best help the child, without any information on the child's special needs.
- May feel guilt or shame regarding their child's condition, in particular those from different cultural backgrounds.
- Are simply unaware that the parish offers resources for their child. They may assume the parish is unable to adapt to those needs, and never come forward to ask.

Information in the bulletin, in parish catechetical brochures and flyers, or on the website should include a few sentences emphasizing that children with disabilities are welcome into the program. [See Appendix for examples](#) (see page 87).

It could start as simple as this:

Did you know?

All children with disabilities are welcome in our Religious Education program. In fact, it is not complete without every child.

Please call (Name) at (Number) to plan for accommodations or speak with us when registering your child(ren).

3 COLLECT INFORMATION AT REGISTRATION

It is very important to collect accurate information on the nature of the disability, to best serve the child and his or her family. Careful attention should be given to developing forms and questionnaires. A multi-form approach may serve best. Some parishes use a multi-step process, which may include the initial registration, another form asking for more detailed information on the disability, and a summary for the catechist.

[Examples of these forms can be found in the Appendix](#) (see page 88).

1. **Begin with standard registration form for the catechetical program**

A short yes/no question can be included asking if the child has any type of medical conditions or disabilities. For example, “Does your child have any special health care, cognitive, learning, or behavioral needs (i.e., allergies, seizures, Autism, learning disability, ADHD)?”



Blessed Margaret of Castello was blind and crippled, cast off by her wealthy parents and lived the rest of her life on the streets. Today, she is the patron saint of the poor, disabled, and unwanted.

2. **If the answer is yes, use a second form**

Include questions about specific health conditions and disabilities. It is helpful to explain to parents that this information is being collected in order to best serve the children.

3. **If the health form indicates a child has a severe disability** (for example, Autism, an intellectual disability, behavioral challenges, a complicated medical condition or multiple disabilities), it will be important to gather more detailed information. A face-to-face meeting with the parents and the child to collect detailed information would be helpful. The detailed [Student Information Form](#) (see page 92) has questions about communication, motor skills, social and emotional development, strengths, difficulties, helpful strategies, and more. This form will help to place the child according to his or her needs.

4. **Compile short summary**

It can be helpful to condense that information into a short summary or [placement form](#) (see page 102) for the catechist. The catechist may also find it helpful to include information from this manual on that child's specific disability, and tips for working with the child.

3a INCORPORATE BONUS INFORMATION FROM THE IEP

During the registration and information gathering process, parish personnel may be presented with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). That means the child with a disability is receiving school services paid for through federal tax dollars. This is a legally binding document for public schools that details the student's learning needs, identified goals, and methods for measuring progress. The IEP has helpful information on learning style and supports or accommodations.

If the parents choose to share their child's IEP, the catechetical leader and/or the catechist can see other needs that the child may have for classroom support. Please be aware **that this is a confidential document, and is protected by privacy laws. Parish personnel cannot require the IEP or ISP, or directly ask to see it.**

If parents choose to share the IEP, the following sections of information can be helpful:

- **Annual Goals** — Indicates those skills that are currently being addressed for the duration of the calendar year, and indicates specific methodologies to use in the school.
- **Special Education Services** — Can assist the catechist in understanding what levels of service are required to support the student. Services such as Speech Therapy, Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Music Therapy, and 1:1 Paraprofessional supports can be found here.
- **Accommodations and Modifications for Instruction** — This section can be useful in finding information about specific types of supports and modifications that are beneficial. Examples of accommodations may include individual or small group instruction, enlarging text; modifications of content; reading orally; providing word cards or choice boards; providing extended time for assignments; utilization of pictures or augmentative devices and/or provision of adaptive equipment.

3b INCORPORATE BONUS INFORMATION FROM THE ISP

During the registration and information gathering process, parish personnel may be presented with an Individual Support Plan (ISP). That means the individual with a disability is receiving medically necessary services paid for through the Arizona Department of Economic Security-Division of Developmental Disabilities. This document details the individual's medical needs inclusive of medication and adaptive aids, identified safety risks such as life threatening behavior, medical issues, behavioral issues, and or safety issues; and then details services to be provided to meet identified goals.

This is a confidential document protected by privacy laws. The Director of Religious Education and/or catechist should not ask for this document directly. However, if the document is shared by the family, the ISP can provide the catechist with helpful information particularly related to community function, interaction, and support. The catechist should not allow the document to dictate or predetermine approaches of interaction with the individual.

Parish personnel cannot require the ISP or directly ask to see it.

If parents choose to share the ISP, the following sections of information can be helpful:

- **Annual Goals** — Indicates those skills that are currently being addressed for the duration of the calendar year, and indicates specific methodologies to use in the school.
- **Special Education Services** — Can assist the catechist in understanding what levels of service are required to support the student. Services such as Speech Therapy, Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Music Therapy, 1:1 Paraprofessional supports can be found here.
- **Accommodations and Modifications for Instruction** — This section can be useful in finding information about specific types of supports and modifications that are beneficial. Examples of accommodations may include individual or small group instruction, enlarging text; modifications of content; reading orally; providing word cards or choice boards; providing extended time for assignments; utilization of pictures or augmentative devices and/or provision of adaptive equipment.

4 COMPILE A DATABASE

Once the proper information is collected on the child, the next step should be compiling a database of children with special health care needs and disabilities. This database can include:

- the child's name, date of birth
- parents' names and contact information
- disability and notes provided by the family
- sacramental information
- class and catechist information

Other information can be included, as well. Assembling and organizing this data in one place will demonstrate the needs in the entire program and identify what actions are necessary.

For larger programs with multiple classes per grade, having this database can also help prevent placing too many children with disabilities in one class. For example, if a parish has four third-graders with attention deficit disorder, they can be spread out between classes instead of all being placed in one class.

5 DISCERN PLACEMENT/ACCOMMODATIONS

Once the information has been collected, the parents and catechetical staff need to decide on the best placement and accommodations for the child. This varies from child to child and depends on the parish's resources and abilities.



In deciding the appropriate placement and assistance for the child with disabilities, the needs of the parents must be considered. Parishes are encouraged to approach parents with true pastoral sensitivity, and enable them to address the needs of the parents as well as those of the child.

The following options range from least restrictive to most restrictive; however, sometimes a little creativity is needed.

1. **TYPICAL CATECHETICAL CLASS:** Children with minor needs can be placed in regular classes with support for the student and the catechist. It is important to let catechists know about the disabilities and needs of children in their class to help prevent potential problems. An easy way to inform catechists is by giving them a form with

details regarding the child. There is an example of this type of form, called [a Placement Form](#), in the Appendix (*see page 91*).

2. **TYPICAL CLASS WITH AN AIDE**: A child who has more needs can be placed in a regular class and have an extra aide assigned to help them specifically. This aide can be their parent, their habilitation provider, or a volunteer parishioner, depending on the situation. It is important to remember that parents and habilitation providers are required to fulfill the volunteer requirements of the catechetical program and the [diocesan Safe Environment policy](#), as are all volunteers.

3. **PULL-OUT INSTRUCTION**: Sometimes, a child who is in a regular class would benefit from being pulled aside or out of class to receive one-on-one or small group instruction, especially as the time for receiving sacraments approaches. This instruction can be provided by a staff member, an aide in the class, a teen mentor, or another volunteer parishioner.

Receiving instruction one-on-one or in a small group will help children with cognitive impairments, autism or severe learning disabilities to better focus on the material. In addition, it will allow these students to learn the material on their level by presenting essential concepts using simple language, pictures and other visuals. Lastly, one-on-one or small group lessons allow students to demonstrate their understanding by speaking or by pointing to pictures if written or verbal communication is difficult for them.

4. **SPECIAL EDUCATION CLASS**: Children with more severe disabilities who are not served well in a regular class can participate in a special education class, if possible. The decision to place a child in a separate, special education class should be made with the parent using information provided by the family and gathered when meeting with the child. The child's classroom at school and the accommodations he or she receives there should be considered, as well.

It is important to include children who have disabilities with their peers as much as possible, but there are many **benefits of a special education class** for a child with more severe disabilities:

- First, the class size and student/teacher ratio is significantly lower than a typical class. A large class can be very overwhelming for many children with disabilities, and it is difficult to give them the attention they require.
- Second, the entire class can be tailored to the level of the children who are in the class.
- Third, the catechist can create a simple class schedule that will help the children feel more secure because they will learn what to expect each week.

These benefits will help the students feel more comfortable in their class, which will help reduce negative behaviors and lead to more positive social interactions. Hopefully, it will allow each child to develop a better understanding of the Catholic faith, God's love, and prayer.

5. **SPECIAL EDUCATION CLASS COMBINED WITH ONE-ON-ONE INSTRUCTION**: Another alternative combines the special education class with one-on-one instruction. In this scenario, children meet as a group for part of the class and then break off with a teacher for one-on-one instruction. This option allows for group activities, social

interaction and fellowship but also offers the benefits of individual instruction that can be tailored to the child. If a child with a disability is not able attend catechetical classes when they are offered because of therapy, a one-on-one situation may be the best alternative. This method was developed by Deacon Larry Sutton and is described in the book, *How to Welcome, Include and Catechize Children with Autism and Other Special Needs* (see [Books in the Resources section](#) (see page 78) for a more detailed review) Parishes, particularly those with lower numbers of children with disabilities, may find this approach most attainable.

6. **ONE-ON-ONE INSTRUCTION:** In certain circumstances, an individual with disabilities might receive one-on-one instruction with a staff member or volunteer parishioner. This may occur when a child who cannot tolerate even a small group setting or when there are no other children in the same age range. For example, a 17-year-old should not be in a class with younger elementary aged children, even if they are developmentally at the same level. Another obstacle for families who have children with disabilities is the amount of therapy the child attends each week.
7. **IN-HOME CATECHESIS:** In rare cases, an individual may not be able to attend classes at the parish on a regular basis. For a child who is medically fragile, physically frail, or has a severe mental disability, in-home catechesis may be the best solution. In these instances, the message of God's love, the richness of the Catholic faith and an opportunity for prayer is brought to the child by a catechist. It is extremely important that the catechist has completed all volunteer requirements of the parish and diocese, including Safe Environment and reference checks. This option must be discussed with the pastor. Before going into the family's home, the catechist or catechetical staff should discuss with the parents the importance of providing them a space to meet in the open. The parents must agree to be present and available while the catechist is in the home.
8. **HOME SCHOOLING:** Some families may prefer to provide catechetical instruction to their children at home. The diocesan guidelines for homeschooling can be found at <http://dphx.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/HomeSchoolingPolicy-1.pdf>. The guidelines for homeschooling are the same for children with or without disabilities. Parents are the first catechists of their children in the ways of faith and are certainly welcome to home school their children for catechetical instruction. However, in the case of children with disabilities, parents are often overwhelmed and overburdened and may find this difficult. Parishes are encouraged to find ways to adapt the parish offerings so parents can freely choose between parish programs that are fully inclusive or homeschooling.

RECRUITING AND TRAINING CATECHISTS AND VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers are one of the most essential resources needed to serve children with disabilities. While it is beneficial to have a variety of people helping, it is important to recruit some parishioners who have experience working with individuals with disabilities, including special education teachers, special education aides, parents of children with disabilities, therapists, and habilitation providers. These experts will be of great assistance.

RECRUITING

Placing an announcement in your bulletin or making a brief pulpit announcement can bring people forward. Certain traits can be more important than experience, training or degrees.

Vital qualities to look for:

- Commitment
- Promptness
- Reliability
- Consistency
- Patience
- Gentleness
- A loving and open heart

It can also be stated in these announcements that volunteers who have little or no experience are needed, as well. Most importantly, the primary catechist must be a practicing Catholic who is living a sacramental life.

“Whoever is called to teach Christ must first seek the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus; he must suffer the loss of all things in order to gain Christ and be found in him...From this loving knowledge of Christ springs the desire to proclaim him, to evangelize, and to lead others to the yes of faith in Jesus Christ.”

-Catechism of the Catholic Church 428-29

Raising awareness of the disability ministry may bring forth volunteers. For instance, some parishes ask newly registered parishioners how they would like to become involved in parish ministry, which is a great way to find volunteers. If a list of parish ministries is given to new parishioners, include the disability ministry. It should also be included on the parish website, in the bulletin, and in other parish information (parish app, parish directory, etc).

TRAINING

Training volunteers who come forward will vary depending on their experience:

- **For people who have little or no experience with individuals who have disabilities**, they will need an overview of the kinds of disabilities they will encounter in their ministry. See [Section IV: Disabilities Defined](#). (see page 47). They will also need training on how to work with different children, including ways they should and should not interact with them.
- **People who have experience with disabilities** may already have this knowledge, so they simply need information on the program and their role within it. All volunteers need to understand the importance of their commitment. Children with disabilities need consistency, and volunteers can help keep consistency by being reliable and prompt.

It should be stressed that it can also be a safety concern if too many volunteers are absent on the same day. Of course, those who participate in catechetical instruction should be included in the parish catechist formation, and compliant with diocesan mandatory safe environment policy and catechist certification policy if applicable.

PREPARING THE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

When including children with disabilities into a catechetical program, it is important to make reasonable accommodations and preparations to the environment. This helps children feel more comfortable and capable, promotes positive behavior and facilitates openness to Christ. These preparations may be different for a regular catechetical class versus a class specifically for children with disabilities. In a classroom for children with disabilities, the adaptations can be more comprehensive and widespread. Preparations will vary depending on the disability, so the needs of individual children should be considered.

Frequently, catechetical instruction takes place in a shared space, such as a school classroom, parish meeting room, or other areas over which the catechist has little control. If this is the case, and a child needs accommodations, there may be minor, reasonable changes that can make the space more welcoming for the child such as:

- Turning off a fan, as the movement can be highly distracting for a child with autism.
- Shifting furniture positions to allow for a wheelchair. This may require collaboration with the school or parish business manager.

PREPARING FOR A TYPICAL CATECHETICAL CLASS

If a child with disabilities is present in the typical catechetical classroom, certain preparations can be made to help the child feel more comfortable and capable.

SAFETY

- Make sure there are no dangerous items accessible to the children. This includes sharp or heavy objects, cleaners, and even hand sanitizer or antibacterial wipes.
- If possible, meet in a room with doors that can close to reduce the risk of a child wandering out.
- Understand all allergy and medical conditions and keep that information in the classroom when in session.

LESSON PLANNING

Account for a variety of activities that use multiple senses — [more on multimodal learning](#) (see page 36)— to ensure you're reaching children with various learning needs.

The times for each activity will vary depending on the time set aside for the catechetical class. After creating the lesson plan, ask the following questions:

- ***Who would not be able to participate fully in this activity?*** For example, the nature of certain activities may exclude a child with a physical disability, a child with limited verbal communication or a child who cannot read.
- ***Can I modify the activity so this person can participate?*** If it is decided that a child with a certain disability would not be able to participate, the catechist may need to be creative to adapt it. Alternatively, it could be as easy as switching from silent reading to reading with a partner so the child who cannot read can still participate.

PREPARING THE ENVIRONMENT

- Reduce sensory input. Distractions caused by room temperature, smell and noise should be limited.
- It may be helpful to have a designated place for a child to take a break. It may be difficult to find space in a full class, but if a space is made, it can include items that are known to be calming and helpful to the specific child integrated in the catechetical class.
- Attempt to limit things that children might try to get into like totes, file cabinets, closets, desks or piles of papers. Solutions may be as simple as using lids and locks when possible, putting material in boxes until needed, or even turning a desk or other objects around.
- Consider having an extra aide available to work with the child with disabilities.

SCHEDULE

Setting up a schedule is an extremely beneficial preparation that can be made for a child with a disability.

This schedule can be written on the board and crossed out as activities are completed, or a schedule can be made just for the child with disabilities who is in the class. Using pictures is always helpful.

ENGAGED LEARNING

Active engagement in the catechesis process is essential for all children. It is important to keep in mind that children may have varying attention spans, which may also vary from week to week. Therefore, for any child, it is effective to break the class into activities that last an appropriate amount of time for his or her age and the type of activity.

A good place to start is to use the age of the child to gauge how many minutes they can attend to a lesson or an assigned task. For example, five minutes for a five-year-old or eight minutes for an eight-year-old. However, if an activity is engaging and hands-on, typical children may be able to focus on it for double or triple that amount of time.

Lessons and activities that are interactive and interesting will benefit all children. Engaging lessons and activities are even more important for children with disabilities because they may be able to attend to a lesson or task for even less time.

Here are some strategies to help keep their attention, especially children with cognitive impairments, autism, learning disabilities, or attention disorders:

- Use visuals whenever possible, such as pictures, drawings, diagrams, felt boards, figurines, or videos.
- Plan activities that use a variety of senses, including hands-on activities like crafts, drawing, puzzles, picture matching, music, storytelling, or games.
- Look online for ideas from other catechists. Pinterest, Catholicicing.com, thereligionteacher.com and other sites have a variety of great ideas and lesson plans.
- A more extensive list of classroom activities ideas can be found in the Appendix.

BEHAVIORAL MANAGEMENT

A preparation that will help all children, especially those with autism, intellectual disabilities, and behavioral disorders, is to effectively manage behavior.

- Decide on clear, concrete and important expectations for the class. Engaging the children in this process can be beneficial.
- Post expectations, using pictures if there are children who cannot read.
- Determine rewards and consequences for following and not following the rules. Be sure the rewards and consequences are made clear to the children.
- Occasionally, a child with a disability may need his or her own behavior management chart. In this case, a child can receive a sticker or check mark on the reward chart when following expectations.

If the child reaches an agreed upon number of marks, then he or she will receive an agreed upon reward. The reward can come from the catechist, like a visit to a treasure box, or it can come from the parent, such as time on the playground, an ice cream cone from McDonalds, or extra video game time at home. [An example of a reward chart](#) (see page 103) can be found in the Appendix.

PREPARING FOR A SPECIAL EDUCATION CATECHETICAL CLASS

Some parishes may have a separate class for children with disabilities, including a designated classroom for that group of children. If a parish has a separate Special Education catechetical class, safety should be top priority.

SAFETY

- Be sure there are enough volunteers to help with the number of children attending and the severity of their disabilities.
- Ensure there are no dangerous items accessible to the children like sharp or heavy objects, cleaner, or even hand sanitizer or antibacterial wipes.
- It is also important to have doors that can close so children cannot easily wander out.
- Have parents explain all allergies and medical conditions. Then, pass this information on to the catechists in the class, and keep the information in the room during class time.

PREPARING THE ENVIRONMENT

- The environment can be prepared by reducing sensory input. If possible, adjust the thermostat so the room is not too hot or stuffy but not too cold or drafty. Do not use air freshener or heavy perfume. Reduce noise by closing doors and windows, playing soft background music, and reminding children that shouting is not allowed.
- If breaking off to work one-on-one or in small groups in the class, put as much space between groups as possible.
- Attempt to limit things that children might try to get into like totes, file cabinets, closets, desks or piles of papers. Solutions may be as simple as using lids and locks when possible, putting material in boxes until needed, or even turning a desk or other objects around.
- Sometimes a child with a disability might need a break. Try to find a place where children can go if they are upset and/or need time to calm down; preferably removed from the other children but still within the room. A portable screen can be used to make the space feel more private and removed. In the space, provide a chair but also allow standing or pacing. Include a few calming items in the space. Different children find different things calming, but some examples include a soft object, silly putty, bean bags, a non-breakable snow globe, a small therapy ball, or a rocking chair.

SCHEDULE

- Develop a consistent, simple schedule, with designated areas for the activities in the schedule.
- This schedule should be posted with words and pictures. A schedule board can be made using foam board or other rigid material, Velcro and laminated cards. The Velcro allows the cards to be removed once that part of the schedule is complete. This process helps children with disabilities understand what has been done, what is coming next, and how much of the class is left, which can relieve anxiety.
- The cards can be made using pictures from clipart, the internet or a picture subscription. There is also a software program called Boardmaker, which can make these types of cards using pictures that are already familiar to the child from school. A parent in your parish or a parishioner who works in a school may have access to Boardmaker.

- An example of a schedule for a Special Education catechesis class is as follows:
 - **Circle Time** (this means come to circle time)
 - **Song** (it can be helpful for the children to sing the same song each week)
 - **Prayer** (this can be a time to learn about prayer and liturgical seasons and to say an opening prayer)
 - **Lesson** (present a short lesson using lots of visuals, as well as songs and stories)
 - **Work Time** (children complete a task like a craft or picture matching to reinforce the lesson)
 - **Circle Time** (come back to circle time)
 - **Sharing** (children share the work they have done)
 - **Rosary** (start small by praying one prayer a week and build up throughout the class to whatever the children can handle)

MULTIMODAL LEARNING

Multimodal learning is the different methods of learning or understanding new information, and are ways in which a person takes in, understands, expresses and remembers information. There are four predominant learning styles: **visual**, **auditory**, **read/write**, and **kinesthetic**.

Learning the predominant learning style of a child is very important to teach and refocus the child's attention during a catechetical lesson. Utilizing a mixture of all methods is helpful for all children, not just those with disabilities. The catechist should strive to incorporate multimodal learning in lesson planning whether in a typical or a Special Education classroom.

VISUAL LEARNERS

Learn through Seeing

- Real objects are preferable to pictures (a statue, a rosary, etc.).
- Use visuals to teach lessons, such as pictures, graphics, flow charts, images, charts, outlines, story maps, symbols, drawings and diagrams. Be careful when choosing visuals; the more abstract the image, the more difficult it will be to identify.
- When giving verbal directions, write down key words or phrases, and use visuals to demonstrate what the child should do.
- Utilize color coding, especially when using dry erase boards. Use color cues, framing and symbols to highlight key information to create more visual stimulation.
- If vocabulary in a video or audio story is not understandable by the child, modify it by turning off the audio and use your own words.

ACTIVITY IDEAS

- Reading silently
- Reading with symbols/pictures in place of certain words
- Using objects/pictures/drawings/maps to accompany a story or to illustrate a concept
- Flannel board story
- Videos
- Slideshow
- Cartoon strips
- Matching activities

AUDITORY LEARNERS

Learn through Listening

- **Reading/Lecture:** Focus on text book readings by reading them out loud, so you can hear how the words sound. Include storytelling, poetry, Bible stories, etc.



- **Music/Audiobooks:** Add a tune to a concept and sing. Quiet music in the background can provide children with a chance to reflect on, assimilate, and integrate what they have learned.
- **Silence:** A time with no verbal input can provide a time for interior prayer. Children with anxiety, autism and many other disabilities need silence and quiet time to recover focus.

ACTIVITY IDEAS

- | | | |
|--|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| • Reading aloud | Creating a poem | Telling a story in character |
| • Choral reading | Listening to a poem | Telling a story with puppets |
| • Storytelling | Singing/Creating a song | Debate/discussion |
| • Listening to music | Conducting an interview | Praying |
| • Brainstorming | Sharing experiences | |
| • Silence, with background music if desired (time for reflection, interior prayer) | | |

READ/WRITE

Learn through Reading and Writing

- Independent learners work best in quiet areas.
- Flashcards can be a great aide to learn concepts.
- Glossaries and lists can very useful learning tools.
- Journaling and writing activities are helpful.

ACTIVITY IDEAS

- | | | |
|------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| • Word searches | Treasure hunts | Hangman |
| • Mazes | Scavenger hunts | Pictionary |
| • Card games | Board games | Crossword puzzles |
| • Adapt TV games shows | Trivia | |

- **Incorporate all five senses:** Using all five senses will result in the child having a higher recall.
- **Utilize tactile learning:** Art, manipulatives, flannel boards, etc. are ways to teach concepts and assess learning. This is especially useful for children who have verbal impairments since they can answer by pointing, drawing, signing, rearranging words or pictures, etc.
- **Physical activity:** Body/kinesthetic intelligence involves physical movement such as physical exercises, drama, role play, body language, puppets and creative or interpretive dance.

ACTIVITY IDEAS

- | | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------|
| • Creating a poem | Puppet show | Making food |
| • Creating a song | Finger puppets | Eating |
| • Journaling | Art | Planting |
| • Mime | Clay | Dancing |
| • Drama/Charades | Collages | Searching |
| • Role-playing | Dioramas | Making timelines |
| • Making a video | Murals/posters | Puzzles |
| • Moving around the room | Writing a newspaper article | Games |

Section III

Parish Life Considerations

The need for inclusion should be of concern to every parish. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops urges parishes to consider the needs of persons with disabilities:

“Evangelization efforts are most effective when promoted by diocesan staff and parish committees...Where no such evangelization efforts exist, we urge that they be developed.”

-U.S. Catholic Bishops

Welcome and Justice for Persons with Disabilities

1995

Creating an attitude of openness and inclusion can take time and effort, but it is always worth it.

- **Be aware of the very real challenges parents are facing.** While acknowledging that the child is a gift to the family and to the Church, the family may be undergoing struggles that need the parish’s compassion and support.
- **Consider ways that the parish can truly walk with families** and provide appropriate pastoral support.
 - Start a parent and/or sibling support group.
 - Host a ministry fair with resources for those with disabilities (*see page 80*) in Resource section for list of [local and national resources](#)).
 - Invite speakers to the parish to talk about issues and needs of persons with disabilities.
 - Include training in disabilities as part of catechist formation.
 - Explore ways of including people with disabilities in child and adult faith formation and ministry as well as during the Mass and celebration of the sacraments.
 - Ask your parishioners who have disabilities to share their experiences with the parish.
- **Use the parish bulletin to spread awareness** of parish efforts, to recruit volunteers, and to inform families of the existence of the disability ministry. The bulletin can also be used in a more general way to raise parish awareness.

For example, the bulletin could highlight saints who had disabilities each month. The recent Holy Fathers have written many beautiful documents, homilies and speeches on the disabled, weak and elderly. Quotes from these or other documents on disabilities could be featured on a regular basis.
- **Don’t reinvent the wheel!** Connect with local parishes that have a ministry to children with disabilities.

What did that parish find successful? What is the current best practices at the parish? Use available resources, including the [comprehensive list of local and national resources](#) found in the Resources section (*see page 80*). Spending time reading and researching now could save a great deal of time and effort, and minimize failures when launching or growing a disability ministry.
- **Ministry to persons with disabilities is not an optional extra;** rather, those with disabilities are fully our brothers and sisters in Christ.

*“The starting point for every reflection on disability is rooted in the fundamental convictions of Christian anthropology: even when disabled persons are mentally impaired or when their sensory or intellectual capacity is damaged, **they are fully human beings and possess the sacred and inalienable rights that belong to every human creature**...The wounded humanity of the disabled challenges us to recognize, accept and promote in each one of these brothers and sisters of ours the incomparable value of the human being created by God to be a son in the Son.”*

-St. Pope John Paul II

[Message for International Symposium On The Dignity And Rights Of The Mentally Disabled Person](#)

2004

TRAINING FOR USHERS OR MINISTERS OF HOSPITALITY

Ushers or ministers of hospitality have a very important role in the life of a parish. They represent Christ and usually are the first ones to be encountered as parishioners and visitors enter the church campus. Their ministry consists of helping everyone feel welcome and at home. Ushers or ministers of hospitality have a great opportunity to model to the parish community appropriate interactions with people who have disabilities.

“To show disabled persons that we love them means showing them that we value them. Attentive listening, understanding their needs, sharing their suffering, patience in guidance, are some of the ways to introduce the disabled into a human relationship of communion, to enable them to perceive their own value and make them aware of their capacity for receiving and giving love.”

-St. Pope John Paul II

[Message for International Symposium On The Dignity And Rights Of The Mentally Disabled Person](#)
2004

Pastors and staff are encouraged to carefully consider the role of the usher or minister of hospitality and offer appropriate initial and continual formation.

The following tips are offered to welcome those with disabilities to the parish:

HELPFUL TIPS

- Relax, we are all people with challenges. Be polite and use common sense.
- Focus on the person, not the disability.
- Speak directly to the person, not the companion or interpreter.
- Use normal voice and volume, unless instructed to do otherwise.
- Do not assume help is needed, always ask first.
- Do not touch assistive equipment without permission.
- Offer assistance in walking down the aisle or upstairs to those who need it.
- If ministering to a person with an intellectual disability or autism spectrum disorder, speak directly using a calm voice and ask if you can be of help. Be sensitive to the fact that some church routines or random circumstances can create an emotional overflow which can lead to behaviors such as sudden screaming, flapping of hands, abrupt movements, running, pushing or throwing things. Refrain from immediate physical contact. Do not try to redirect behavioral outbursts. Offer a quiet space to rest. Use body language to determine if the person is comfortable with eye contact.

- If ministering to a blind person, lightly tap person on the arm to introduce yourself or speak. If asked to guide, hold out your elbow to lead rather than taking the person's arm. Provide materials in Braille.
- If ministering to a deaf person, do not assume lip reading. Do not exaggerate lip movements or cover your mouth. Face the person and speak at eye level. Offer a printed summary of the homily. Provide a sign language interpreter and allow for seating with an unobstructed view of the speaker or interpreter.

LITURGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

A parish community is a combination of its many members and their unique talents. It is essential to develop plans which allow those with disabilities to fully take part in the sacred liturgy, which is their baptismal right. In addition, the pastor and parish leaders can search for meaningful ways for children and adults with disabilities to serve the parish according to their gifts and interests.

“It is essential that all forms of the liturgy be completely accessible to people with disabilities, since these forms are the essence of the spiritual tie that binds the Christian community together...Realistic provision must be made for persons with disabilities to participate fully in the Eucharist and other liturgical celebrations such as the sacraments of Reconciliation, Confirmation and Anointing of the Sick...Celebrating liturgies simultaneously in sign language enables the deaf person to enter more deeply into their spirit and meaning. Participation aids such as Mass books and hymnals in large print or Braille serve the same purpose for blind or partially sighted members.”

-U.S. Catholic Bishops

Pastoral Statement on Persons with Disabilities

Nov. 16, 1978

The parish would do well to consider the needs of persons with disabilities in planning liturgies. Following are practical tips to help a parish make reasonable accommodations and include those with disabilities in the liturgical roles appropriate to lay people.

HELPFUL TIPS

- If possible, remove steps to the ambo or make space near the ambo for those with wheelchairs.
- Place Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion in an area that does not require going up or down steps.
- Schedule people with celiac disease to be Extraordinary Ministers of the Precious Blood.
- Allow participation in the offertory or collection. An usher or family member can accompany if needed to ensure the natural flow in the Mass.
- With the pastor's approval, seek out and encourage children and adults who are cognitively impaired to be altar servers. Assign with willing, trained and experienced servers. It is important that clear and defined roles are assigned to those with disabilities to prevent confusion.
- Allow for special training for those who need extra help because of a physical or cognitive disability.

- Assign someone to assist those who have difficulties with mobility and ensure room for wheelchairs to move freely around the altar.

“The quality of life in a community is measured largely by its commitment to assist the weaker and needier members with respect for their dignity as men and women. The world of rights cannot only be the prerogative of the healthy. People with disabilities must also be enabled to participate in social life as far as they can, and helped to fulfil all their physical, psychological and spiritual potential.”

-St. Pope John Paul II

[Message for International Symposium On The Dignity And Rights Of The Mentally Disabled Person](#)

2004

WORSHIP SPACE CONSIDERATIONS

The design and accessibility of a Church speaks clearly about the parish community efforts to include people with disabilities.

The *Pastoral Statement of the U.S. Catholic Bishops on Persons with Disabilities* states this issue very clearly:

- “The most obvious obstacle to participation in parish activities faced by many people with disabilities is the physical design of parish buildings... Sometimes all that is required to remedy the situation is the installation of outside ramps and railings, increased lighting, minor modification of toilet facilities, and perhaps, the removal of a few pews and kneelers. In other cases, major alterations and redesign of equipment may be called for.” (21)
- Major alterations to the church and parish buildings to accommodate those with disabilities may be out of the reach for some parishes. Parishes are encouraged to seek out grants to assist with the cost of alterations and accommodations. It is up to each parish to determine what they can reasonably change or accommodate. The USCCB stated, “Each parish must examine its own situation to determine the feasibility of such alterations. Mere cost must never be the exclusive consideration, however, since the provisions of free access to religious functions for all interested people is a pastoral duty.” (22)
- If a parish is unable to make large changes, certain minor tweaks to the worship space can greatly aid a person with disabilities. Such minor changes to adapt the environment speak volumes about the parish's commitment to those with disabilities.
- While changes to existing construction may not be possible, future building plans should not overlook the needs of those with disabilities. “Whenever parishes contemplate new construction, they should make provision in their plans for the needs of individuals with disabilities. If both new construction and the adaptation of present buildings are out of the question, the parish should devise other ways to reach its members with disabilities. In cooperation with them, parish leaders may locate substitute facilities, for example, or make a concerted effort to serve at home those who cannot come to church.” (21)



HELPFUL TIPS

Some of the ideas and tips in this section are taken from “[Guiding Principles and Strategies for inclusion in the Liturgy of Catholics with Disabilities](#),” (Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions. Liturgical Arts and Music Committee, August 25, 2005), and “[Welcoming People with Disabilities so All may encounter Christ](#),” (Diocese of Harrisburg, PA, 2012):

- Ensure appropriate and accessible signage in parish facilities as needed.
- Consider replacing some fixed pews with moveable pews or chairs so that people with disabilities may be seated with the community and participate fully. Cut the ends of several pews so that wheelchair users can sit with their friends and families rather than being segregated in the back or front of the worship space.
- Place hymnals and printed materials within easy reach.
- Provide accessible parking spaces and routes with curb cuts and ramps.
- Provide entrances with automatic or easily-opened doors, near accessible parking spaces.
- Provide accessible and handicap-equipped restrooms.
- Consider making the sanctuary and altar accessible by a ramp, and provide adjustable height ambo, microphone, etc.

“Seeing with the eyes of Christ, I can give to others much more than their outward necessities; I can give them the look of love which they crave.”

-Pope Benedict XVI
[*God is Love \(Deus Caritas Est\)*](#)

Section IV

Disabilities Defined

“The love of the Father for the weakest of his children and the continuous presence of Jesus and His Spirit give assurance that every person, however limited, is capable of growth in holiness. Education in the faith, which involves the family above all else, calls for personalized and adequate programmers.”

-General Directory for Catechesis 189

This section examines both particular disabilities, as well as the necessary adaptations to provide for the unique needs of children with various disabilities. Many times, children have more than one disability, so accommodations will vary on an individual basis.

The goal for each child is the same: introduction to Jesus Christ, reception of the sacraments of the Church, and growth in holiness.

NOTE: *It is recommended that you make a copy for the catechist of relevant page(s) within this section as it pertains to a child in his or her classroom. It can help parish leaders better serve the child.*

A child may have one or more of the following types of disabilities:

- **Sensory** Generally defined as an impairment in the normal and healthy function of one or more of the five senses.
- **Motor** Includes any condition that hinders the ability to move or control the body. Symptoms can range from mild to severe and can be combined with other disabilities in the same individual. For example, a child may have cerebral palsy with or without intellectual impairment.
- **Intellectual** Defined as having significant limitations in cognitive and adaptive functioning. There are many causes of intellectual disabilities, including genetic abnormalities, exposure during pregnancy, problems during childbirth, childhood disease, and environmental risks. However, for some individuals, there is no known cause of the disability. The catechist tips can be used with all children with an intellectual disability.
- **Learning** Characterized by a disconnect between the child’s intelligence and the ability to learn. There are no major tests to identify the causes or root problems of learning disabilities. The child whose achievement is substantially lower than their intelligence level may have a learning disability. This disorder affects the ability to read, to write and to do math.

DISCLAIMER: *The information and advice provided here is to assist and guide the catechist in better understanding disabilities and adapting the catechetical classroom and content. No attempt is made to provide medical advice. Ultimately, the lead of the parents must be followed.*

DEAF OR HARD OF HEARING

☒ Sensory ☐ Motor ☐ Intellectual ☐ Learning

Sensory disabilities are generally defined as an impairment in the normal and healthy function of one or more of the five senses.

CHARACTERISTICS

Deafness can be defined in many ways, but is generally acknowledged to be partially or wholly deprived of the sense of hearing. Hearing loss can be diagnosed at birth or occur later in life due to accidents, illness or deterioration. Other children, while not deaf, may have a hearing impairment. These children may also face challenges in the catechetical setting and need accommodations.



Ministered extensively to those who are deaf or hard of hearing

The child who is born deaf and is not introduced to a communication system at home misses out on the first formative years when the brain is open to language and communication development. If the parents have not established a strong communication system in the home, daycare and school environments, the child could be language-delayed.

There are many communication systems for the deaf or hard of hearing child. Some children who are deaf can speak through the help of speech therapy. It is popularly understood that the deaf can read lips, but this is a misconception. Practically speaking, very few people who are deaf learn to read lips. Most deaf children communicate through sign language. One of the most common systems is American Sign Language (ASL), which has its own

language with grammar and syntax rules. ASL is *not* used by all deaf worldwide. There are other sign language systems used around the world. In the United States, students also may communicate in coded English using SEE, SEE II, L.O.V.E., Cued Speech, gestures and finger spelling.

Catechetical programs which include children who are deaf should understand that many will struggle with reading and writing due to language delay. Many children who are deaf have a lower reading level than a typical child in the same grade. In sacramental classes, children who are deaf may be at the 1st and 2nd grade reading and writing levels.

HELPFUL TIPS FOR CATECHISTS

- Do not assume lip reading. Do not exaggerate lip movements or cover your mouth. Face the person and speak at eye level.
- There is a large list of [local resources for the deaf and blind](#) in the resources section (*see page 85*).
- A current list of interpreted Masses, Reconciliation, and catechesis for the deaf is kept in the Office of Family Catechesis. Please visit www.dphx.org/catechesis/ or call (602) 354-2321 for the most up-to-date information.
- Many lessons should be visual, and the reading lessons should use basic language. The catechist should employ Bibles and books which have more pictures for younger grades. A church tour is an excellent way to teach new signs.



- In order to teach ASL signs for new concepts, try to introduce visuals for the students to see and experience. Use an assortment of puzzles, felt books, nativity, bibles, interactive play, and manipulatives. There are some wonderful curricula with manipulatives, basic language books and more, which are explained in the resources section.
 - A family looking for catechetical instruction for their child can hire an interpreter for a typical catechetical classroom. Information found in the [Resources section](#) from the Valley Center for the Deaf and the Arizona Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing can be an excellent starting point (*see page 85*).
- Interpreters: Can and often do serve as language models to young students. If an interpreter is not familiar with the subject materials and/or the Catholic faith, an orientation needs to take place to introduce Catholic doctrine, the catechetical material, discussion of Catholic signs used, and knowledge of the Catholic Church's doctrine. Some ASL signs are unique to the Catholic faith. Interpreter must know the mode of communication the student uses. As explained above, there are many ways the deaf use for communication.
- If there is no professional interpreter available or there are no funds to pay for an interpreter and someone from the parish community is volunteering to work with the student, the student may or may not be receiving the full catechism lessons depending on the adult's signing skill level. There may be many stumbling blocks for the student depending on the student's reading level, the language at home, and the ability for the parent to communicate with the student.
- Children may come from a home where the parents do not sign well and are unable to assist a child with at-home preparation. The child may come to the catechetical class having no basic knowledge of God, prayer, or any of the ASL signs that go with the Catholic faith. It is important to remember that the catechist and the interpreter may be introducing new concepts or signs to a child who has just begun a journey with God.

BLINDNESS OR VISION IMPAIRMENT

☒ Sensory ☐ Motor ☐ Intellectual ☐ Learning

Sensory disabilities are generally defined as an impairment in the normal and healthy function of one or more of the five senses.

CHARACTERISTICS

Vision impairment is defined as full or partial blindness of one or both eyes. Blindness is not a cognitive impairment, unless it is accompanied by an intellectual disorder. The child with vision impairment deserves the same information, education, and experiences which sighted children deserve.

HELPFUL TIPS FOR CATECHISTS

- Find ways to adapt each activity so the child who is blind can participate: **don't ask if it can be done, ask how we can do it.**
- For the first class, allow the child to explore the room with his or her hands to make a mental map of the classroom.
- If the child uses a cane, he or she will use landmarks (the rug outside the office door, the hum of the water fountain, etc.) for self-orienting. Textures and slopes beneath the feet, such as differences between tile, carpeting, concrete, etc., will help the child orient.
- Encourage the child to “look” at objects with the hands. The child who is blind gets information through tactile exploration (touching). Tell the child to “look with two

hands” or “use both hands” when examining something; a touch with one hand or a few fingers gives almost no information.



A young girl dresses as St. Lucy, patron saint of the blind and those with vision impairment.

- If possible, before or after the activity, let the child touch objects that ordinarily would not be handled. For example, place the child's hands on the object, explaining, “This is a host. It feels soft and thin. It's made of wheat flour and water.”
- Use sound when possible. For example, tap a chair with your hand so the child knows to move towards it.
- Demonstrate devotional body language with the child who is blind by placing his or her hands on yours and modeling the prayer movements (sign of the cross, bowing, prayer positions). Peers can also assist the student in learning the movements of prayer.

- Use detailed description when modeling action. For example, say, “Genuflection is touching the floor with my right knee as I make the sign of the cross.”
- Be aware of spatial limitations. For example, when using small craft items, place them in a tray or container. Perhaps a larger table, instead of a small school desk, can be used for certain activities.
- Large-print and/or magnifiers might help if child has low vision. Provide materials in Braille if available.
- Use children’s names when you speak to the group to help the child with visual impairment interpret situations. Encourage other children to use names as well. When you call on children for answers, don’t point: say the names aloud. You can even occasionally rattle off several names, “Oh, I see that Kevin, Maria, Rachel, and José have their hands up. José, what is the answer?”
- Explain your routine a bit: “I’m handing out the papers to each child. I’m so happy you’re all being quiet.” Again, this will help the blind child interpret situations which he or she cannot see.
- Explain illustrations in a story when they help carry the plot. Think about attributes in addition to color when describing or referring to objects, such as shape, weight, texture, size, use, location, quantity, etc.
- Use normal language like “look” and “see.”



MUSCULAR DYSTROPHY

☐ Sensory ☒ Motor ☐ Intellectual ☐ Learning

Motor disabilities include any condition that hinders the ability to move or control the body. Symptoms can range from mild to severe and can be combined with other disabilities in the same individual (eg, a child may have cerebral palsy with or without intellectual impairment).

CHARACTERISTICS

The muscle fibers in the body gradually weaken over time, making it increasingly difficult to perform physical activities. This disease is progressive. The child starts off with mild difficulties at first, progressing to weakness in all movements of the upper and lower extremities.

As time goes on, the child will need increasing assistance with everyday activities. With walking, they will at first have difficulties with balance, progressing to crutches or a walker. Eventually the symptoms become severe enough to require a wheelchair. There are no mental disabilities associated with muscular dystrophy.

HELPFUL TIPS FOR CATECHISTS

- Be sure the child can enter and get around safely in all areas of the classroom, church and restrooms; you may need to move furniture farther apart for a wheelchair to pass through or take up any loose carpeting for a child using crutches or a walker.



effectively. Because of weakness or lack of control of movements in the upper extremities, the child may need larger objects to grab and hold. The child may also need an assistant for some activities such as cutting, gluing or holding smaller objects.

- The child may need a chair with extra support such as arms on the chair.
- ♿ If the child is in a wheelchair, he or she may need a properly-sized table or desk to pull the wheelchair up to. Or he or she may have a table for the wheelchair upon arriving to class.
- Make sure there are appropriate materials that the child can interact with safely and

- Always allow a child to do as much as possible independently and patiently wait for the child to try first before you intervene to help. This shows respect for the child despite his or her disability. (Of course, in cases of safety, there should be quick intervention).
- ♿ Ensure the church has a safe place for a wheelchair, without blocking fire escape routes.
- ♿ Try to keep the wheelchair accommodations as close to the other children as possible when attending Mass or celebrating a sacrament.
- When the child is involved in a retreat, be sure that you consider the level of their disability and adapt the physical activities that you have planned.
 ...eg., if an activity uses a hula hoop, the adaptation would be to use a smaller hula hoop, possibly spinning the hoop with the hand.
 ...eg, if you are planning a very active event and you have a child who can walk but needs assistive devices (walker, crutches, braces), you can change the expectations for that child so they can accomplish the task.

SPINA BIFIDA

☐ Sensory ☒ Motor ☐ Intellectual ☐ Learning

Motor disabilities include any condition that hinders the ability to move or control the body. Symptoms can range from mild to severe and can be combined with other disabilities in the same individual (eg, a child may have cerebral palsy with or without intellectual impairment).

CHARACTERISTICS

Spina bifida is a genetic defect that occurs during pregnancy. While the child is developing in the womb, a hole develops in the spinal column, causing damage to the nerves that run down the spine. Children with spina bifida, depending on the size and location of the hole in the spine, may have:

- Partial or full loss of control of their legs (necessitating either braces, special crutches, a walker or a wheelchair).
- Difficulties with bowel and bladder control.
- Bone and joint deformities (they may not grow normally).
- Curvature (bending) of the spine (sometimes needing a back brace).
- Can possibly have a mental disability due to pressure build-up in the brain from spinal fluid not draining properly.
- A child with this condition may need extra time to process what has been taught, or to process a question. This is due to the spinal fluid not draining properly from the brain.

HELPFUL TIPS FOR CATECHISTS

- Be sure the child can enter and get around safely in all areas of the classroom, church and restrooms; you may need to move furniture farther apart for a wheelchair to pass through or take up any loose carpeting for a child using crutches or a walker.
- The child may need a chair with extra support such as arms on the chair.
- ☞ If the child is in a wheelchair, he or she may need a properly-sized table or desk to pull the wheelchair up to. Or he or she may have a table for the wheelchair upon arriving to class.
- Make sure there are appropriate materials that the child can interact with safely and effectively. Because of weakness or lack of control of movements in the upper extremities, the child may need larger objects to grab and hold. The child may also need an assistant for some activities such as cutting, gluing or holding smaller objects.

- Always allow a child to do as much as possible independently and patiently wait for the child to try first before you intervene to help. This shows respect for the child despite his or her disability. (Of course, in cases of safety, there should be quick intervention).
- ♿ Ensure the church has a safe place for a wheelchair, without blocking fire escape routes.
- ♿ Try to keep the wheelchair accommodations as close to the other children as possible when attending Mass or celebrating a sacrament.
- When planning a retreat, be sure to consider the level of a child's disability and adapt planned physical activities.
 ...eg, If an activity uses a hula hoop, adapt by using a smaller hula hoop, possibly spinning it with the hand.
 ...eg, If planning a very active event and you have a child who can walk but needs assistive devices (walker, crutches, braces), adapt the expectations for that child.



"When I first got there, I was scared about being in a wheelchair. The first day all the kids thought my wheelchair was the coolest thing and they all wanted to push me."

*-eighth-grader, reflecting on her transfer as a second-grader
 St. Thomas the Apostle School*

SPINAL CORD INJURY

☐ Sensory ☒ Motor ☐ Intellectual ☐ Learning

Motor disabilities include any condition that hinders the ability to move or control the body. Symptoms can range from mild to severe and can be combined with other disabilities in the same individual (eg, a child may have cerebral palsy with or without intellectual impairment).

CHARACTERISTICS

A spinal cord injury makes it impossible to move muscles that are below the level of the injury. A lower-level spinal cord injury only affects the legs or lower body. A higher-level injury will affect the whole body, including the arms and hands.

Individuals with spinal cord injuries need to be in a wheelchair unless it is a partial injury; then they could have some muscle movements and be able to walk with braces and special crutches or a walker. There are usually bowel and bladder control issues with spinal cord injuries but there are no mental disabilities caused by a spinal cord injury.

HELPFUL TIPS FOR CATECHISTS

- Be sure the child can enter and get around safely in all areas of the classroom, church and restrooms; you may need to move furniture farther apart for a wheelchair to pass through or take up any loose carpeting for a child using crutches or a walker.
- The child may need a chair with extra support such as arms on the chair.
- ☞ If the child is in a wheelchair, he or she may need a properly-sized table or desk to pull the wheelchair up to. Or he or she may have a table for the wheelchair upon arriving to class.
- Weakness or lack of control of movements in the upper extremities may require larger objects for the child to grab and hold. The child may also need an assistant for some activities such as cutting, gluing or holding smaller objects.
- Always allow a child to do as much as possible independently and patiently wait for the child to try first before you intervene to help. This shows respect for the child despite his or her disability. (Of course, in cases of safety, there should be quick intervention).
- ☞ Ensure the church has a safe place for a wheelchair, without blocking fire escape routes. At the same time, try to keep the wheelchair accommodations as close to the other children as possible when attending Mass or celebrating a sacrament.
- For retreat planning, consider the level of a child's disability and adapt planned physical activities.
eg, If an activity uses a hula hoop, adapt by using a smaller hula hoop, possibly spinning it with the hand.
eg, If planning a very active event and you have a child who can walk but needs assistive devices (walker, crutches, braces), adapt the expectations for that child.

CEREBRAL PALSY

☐ Sensory ☒ Motor ☐ Intellectual ☐ Learning

Motor disabilities include any condition that hinders the ability to move or control the body. Symptoms can range from mild to severe and can be combined with other disabilities in the same individual (eg, a child may have cerebral palsy with or without intellectual impairment).

CHARACTERISTICS

Cerebral palsy is caused by damage to the parts of the brain which control movement. The damage can occur during pregnancy or be due to premature birth or trauma during delivery. Cerebral palsy might also be known according to the portions of the body it affects:

- Hemiplegia involves muscles on one side of the body
- Diplegia involves muscles in the lower part of the body
- Quadriplegia involves muscles in both arms and both legs

A child with cerebral palsy may have mild symptoms and can walk with braces or a walker or special crutches. Other cases of cerebral palsy may exhibit more severe symptoms and the child may be in a wheelchair.

Types of cerebral palsy:

- Ataxia exhibits problems with balance and coordination
- Spasticity exhibits abnormal muscle tightness making movement difficult
- Athetoid exhibits involuntary and uncontrollable movements

A child may have difficulty with:

- Posture (difficulty keeping their body in a chosen position)
- Controlling movement either of certain body parts or the whole body
- Muscle weakness or tightness
- Involuntary muscle movements (spasms)
- Balance and coordination
- Speech intelligibility due to facial muscle involvement
- Eating, also due to facial muscle involvement
- Possible mental disability from a more global brain injury
- Impaired vision

HELPFUL TIPS FOR CATECHISTS

- Allow the child enough time to respond to a request. He or she usually needs time to react with a controlled movement or a verbal response. Allowing the opportunity to “do it themselves” instead of quickly intervening to help or being patient while the child sometimes painstakingly forms words shows respect for who the child is. Remember that the child may or may not have a mental disability; however, it is easy to mistakenly assume one when the child’s speech is hard to understand.
- If necessary, place materials in a way that allows for one-handed use, such as putting them on a non-slide mat in front of the child.
- Since it is hard to control movements due to spasticity or involuntary movements when using upper extremities, the catechist may need to use larger and softer objects to interact with. An assistant may be needed for some activities such as cutting, gluing or holding something.
- A child may have a very complex wheelchair due to postural problems. Be sure to ask the parent if there is anything that may need to be known to use the chair properly. It is important to not change anything on the chair.
- When spasticity is present, avoid pulling against the tight muscle. For example, if the child is holding tight to something that they need to let go, instead of trying to pull the fingers off, gently rub the top of the hand and arm. This will help to relax the spasticity.



BRAIN INJURY

☐ Sensory ☒ Motor ☐ Intellectual ☐ Learning

Motor disabilities include any condition that hinders the ability to move or control the body. Symptoms can range from mild to severe and can be combined with other disabilities in the same individual (eg, a child may have cerebral palsy with or without intellectual impairment).

CHARACTERISTICS

A child who suffers any type of injury to the brain at any point in life such as stroke, near drowning, meningitis or a head injury have symptoms similar to cerebral palsy. In the case of a stroke, it will affect movement on one side of the body. There is a range of severity in these types of injuries.

The child may need braces, special crutches or walkers to help them walk. In more severe cases, the child will not be able to walk and will need a wheelchair. All injuries to the brain can also affect mental abilities and speech abilities.

HELPFUL TIPS FOR CATECHISTS

- Allow the child enough time to respond to a request. He or she usually needs time to react with a controlled movement or a verbal response. Allowing the opportunity to “do it themselves” instead of quickly intervening to help or being patient while the child sometimes painstakingly forms words shows respect for who the child is. Remember that the child may or may not have a mental disability; however, it is easy to mistakenly assume one when the child’s speech is hard to understand.
- If necessary, place materials in a way that allows for one-handed use, such as putting them on a non-slide mat in front of the child.
- Since it is hard to control movements due to spasticity or involuntary movements when using upper extremities, the catechist may need to use larger and softer objects to interact with. An assistant may be needed for some activities such as cutting, gluing or holding something.
- A child may have a very complex wheelchair due to postural problems. Be sure to ask the parent if there is anything that may need to be known to use the chair properly. It is important to not change anything on the chair.
- When spasticity is present, avoid pulling against the tight muscle. For example, if the child is holding tight to something that they need to let go, instead of trying to pull the fingers off, gently rub the top of the hand and arm. This will help to relax the spasticity.

DOWN SYNDROME

☐ Sensory ☐ Motor ☒ Intellectual ☐ Learning

An intellectual disability is defined as having significant limitations in cognitive and adaptive functioning.

There are many causes of intellectual disabilities, including genetic abnormalities, exposure during pregnancy, problems during childbirth, childhood disease, and environmental risks. However, for some individuals, there is no known cause of the disability.

CHARACTERISTICS

Down syndrome is a chromosomal disorder which causes developmental and intellectual disabilities. It is characterized by noticeable physical features: small stature, low muscle tone, a flat facial profile, an upward slant to the eyes, small ears and a protruding tongue. Children with Down syndrome have cognitive delays, meaning they have impairments in processing information and learning.

However, their intellectual impairment is typically mild to moderate. Because of these delays, they may struggle with a short attention span and impulsive behavior. Delays in self-care skills like feeding, dressing and toilet training affect their adaptive functioning.

Children with Down syndrome exhibit delays in their speech. For most children, their expressive language is more delayed than their language comprehension, usually with specific struggles in sentence structure and pronunciation. This difference can lead to frustration as they can understand at a higher level than they can express themselves. Children with Down syndrome can learn to read and sometimes have reading skills that are higher than expected based on their cognitive and language delays.

They also tend to be very social and typically have appropriate social skills and behaviors.

HELPFUL TIPS FOR CATECHISTS

- Because children with Down syndrome can process and retain visual information better than verbal information, it is important to use pictures, manipulatives, and gestures to help the child understand material and retain information.
- Information is processed at a slower rate, so the child may need modified, simplified lessons and repetition. Speak directly using a calm voice.
- Be patient and allow the child time to complete his/her thoughts.
- Pair up a child who has Down syndrome with another child in the class.

- Allow a child with Down syndrome to help; give them a job to do in the classroom.
- When addressing the child, use their name and facilitate eye contact.
- Use plenty of positive reinforcement like praise, high fives, and acknowledgement of good choices.



AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER



☐ Sensory ☐ Motor ☒ Intellectual ☐ Learning

An intellectual disability is defined as having significant limitations in cognitive and adaptive functioning.

There are many causes of intellectual disabilities, including genetic abnormalities, exposure during pregnancy, problems during childbirth, childhood disease, and environmental risks. However, for some individuals, there is no known cause of the disability.

CHARACTERISTICS

Autism is a complex neurological disorder that continues to be heavily researched to identify root causes and effective supports. Autism is primarily a disorder of brain connectivity: the brain is wired differently, and results in the manifestation of a broad range of behaviors that characterize the disorder.

Current terminology refers to autism as Autism Spectrum Disorder or ASD. This spectrum of behaviors sometimes can present as overwhelming to the lay person. As is true in all areas of disability, with autism it is of utmost importance to assume competence.

Autism is not a disorder of intellect but rather of the ability to *demonstrate* intellect due to the manifestation of behaviors described below.

Sensory Processing:

- Repetitive behavior like hand flapping, rocking, vocal tics
- Slamming hands or stomping feet; Putting objects in mouth; Picking at skin
- Posturing arms, body, and/or fingers in odd ways
- Holding hands in front of eyes
- Appearance of adverse reaction to physical affection or being touched
- Inability to tolerate loud noises or crowds
- Over reaction to sensory input in the environment (lights, sounds, textures, bodies)

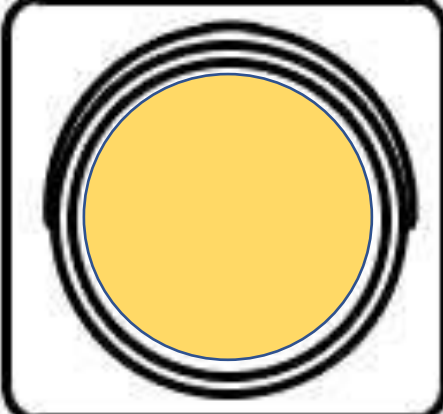
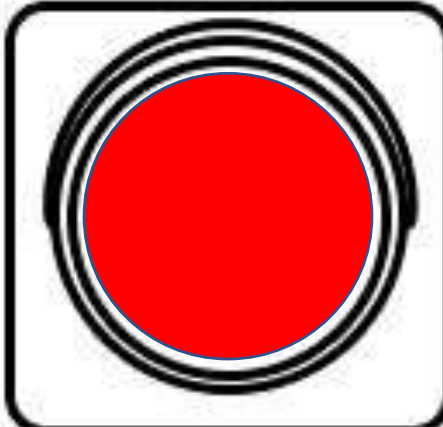
Communication:

- Use of nontraditional communication methods (pushing others toward needs, gesturing, etc.)
- Use of augmentative communication methods (iPad, electronic devices, choice boards, etc.)
- Having no functional communication method available
- Getting stuck in the communication process due to initiation, inhibition, or sustaining issues

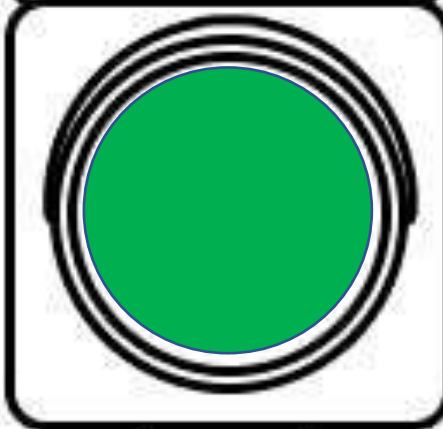
Inability to inhibit (stop)

which may look like:

- Constant motion (fidgeting, moving through the room, not sitting, body overflow)
- Repetitive actions such as repeated pointing, moving of objects, etc.
- Overflow of voice such as sounds, repeated phrases, blurting out words, interrupting others

**Inability to sustain (move through from start to finish) which may look like:**

- Stopping in motion before getting to destination
- Partial completion of work

**Inability to initiate (start)**

which may look like:

- Not responding to a direction
- Not beginning a task
- Flat affect or unresponsiveness
- The appearance of non-engagement
- Not speaking

When the child is emotional, or is confronted with an emotional situation (for example, someone upset or yelling, a child being pushy, their hands being grabbed), it becomes even more difficult for the child to begin, stop or sustain an activity, which may lead to the following behaviors:

- Variances in performance
- Lack of response or non-responsiveness
- Over the top display of emotions (laughing or crying uncontrollably)
- Emotional outburst and disruptive behavior

Social Interaction:

- Presenting as disengaged while actually absorbing the social information around him/her
- Having severe communication breakdown that limits social interaction and experiences
- Being unable to maintain reciprocity in the communication process due to initiation, inhibition, or sustaining issues

HELPFUL TIPS FOR CATECHISTS

- Choose a smaller, more contained classroom, if possible, to minimize distractions and avoid overstimulation.
- Consider turning off any fan, as the movement can be highly distracting for a child with autism.
- Keep materials on the learning surface at a minimum to eliminate distractions.
- Natural light or incandescent light is best; avoid fluorescent lighting if possible. If unable to control lighting situation, try bringing in lamps or reducing the number of lights that are on.
- Choose seating that is comfortable but not overly cushioned.
- Position the child's seat or desk facing into the classroom versus near the doorway or entrance.
- If child has visual sensitivities, pay attention to where the lights are in relation to the child and ensure that there is no glare on the teaching materials.
- Establish a consistent routine for the class.
- Give warning for changes in routine i.e. you can change the routine, but describe the changes and the purpose of the changes as you are getting ready to do them.
- Break down tasks into smaller steps.
- Use pictures to illustrate concepts, stories, and the steps in a task or routine.
- Stay calm especially when the child is not, and minimize direct eye contact if behavior is escalating.
- Because of the sensory aspects of autism, it is extremely important to clarify with parents what types of touch may bother the child. You can. If the child is verbal and aware of his or her sensitivity, ask the child if he or she wants help before touching the child. Typical touch such as placing a hand on the shoulder or brushing hair off the child's face may be intolerable. Providing verbal request or statement to the child before touching him/her is always important.



Patron saint of those with intellectual disabilities

- Give a child space and time to join classroom activities. Encourage and invite but never force.
- Be flexible and creative. If a child is unable to meet the typical expectations of the class, be willing to find alternative options such as allowing a child to stand at his or her desk instead of sitting, permitting a child to stay at his or her desk instead of joining the prayer circle, letting a child hold a quiet object to help with focus and decrease anxiety, or not forcing a child to wear his or her name tag.

My autism is self, but doesn't define myself. The book cover does not show the whole book story.

*-16-year-old with autism
parishioner at St. Thomas More*

ADHD

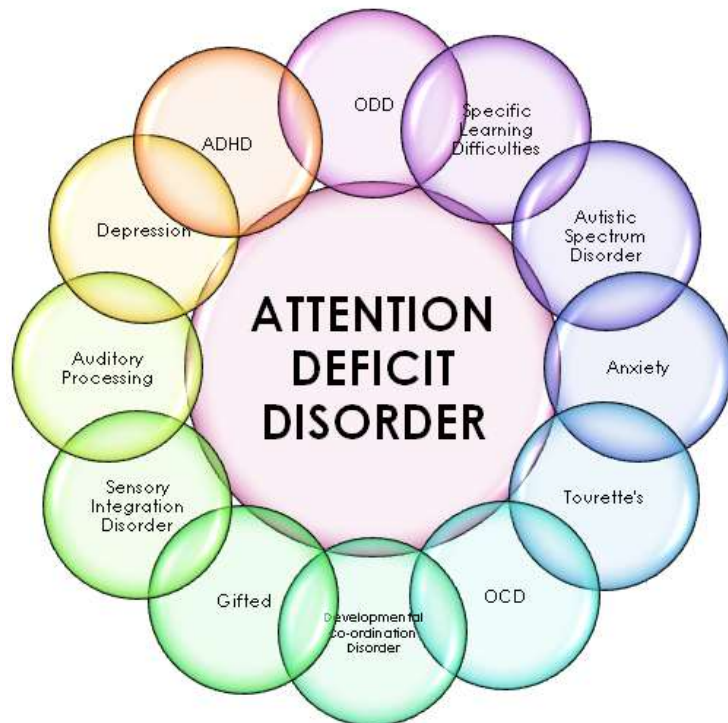
☐ Sensory ☐ Motor ☒ Intellectual ☐ Learning

An intellectual disability is defined as having significant limitations in cognitive and adaptive functioning.

There are many causes of intellectual disabilities, including genetic abnormalities, exposure during pregnancy, problems during childbirth, childhood disease, and environmental risks. However, for some individuals, there is no known cause of the disability.

CHARACTERISTICS

People who have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) find it hard to stay on task and pay attention, even when they try to concentrate. They have a hard time organizing things, listening to instructions, remembering details and controlling their behavior, can't seem to organize tasks or activities, get out of chairs, run around constantly, blurt out answers, etc. Thus, people who have ADHD often have problems getting along with other people and are seen as having behavior problems. ADHD is more common in boys than in girls. You may be more familiar with the term Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). This disorder was renamed in 1994 by the American Psychiatric Association.



Children don't "grow out" of ADHD. Symptoms of ADHD often get better as children grow older and learn to adjust. Hyperactivity usually stops in the late teenage years. But about half of children who have ADHD continue to be easily distracted, have mood swings, hot tempers and are unable to complete tasks.

HELPFUL TIPS FOR CATECHISTS

Successful programs for children with ADD/ADHD integrate a few key components:

Accommodations to make learning easier

- Seat the child with ADD/ADHD away from windows and away from the door.
- Sit the child right in front of your desk unless that would be a distraction for the other children.
- Seats in rows, with focus on the catechist, usually works better than having children seated around tables or facing one another in other arrangements.

Instruction — the methods you use in teaching

- Give instructions one at a time and repeat as necessary.
- Make sure your directions are understood. Get the child's attention and look directly into his or her eyes. Then say in a clear, calm voice specifically what you want. Keep directions simple and short.
Ask the child to repeat the directions back to you. Write down the rules and the results of not following them.
- If possible, work on the most difficult material early in the development of class.
- Use visuals: charts, pictures, color coding, face children as you explain concepts, make eye contact periodically and make sure child is looking at you.
- Create outlines for note-taking that organize the information as you deliver it.

Student work

- Create a quiet area free of distractions for test-taking and quiet study.
- Create worksheets and tests with fewer items; give frequent short quizzes rather than long tests.
- Reduce the number of timed tests.
- Test the child with ADD/ADHD in the way he or she does best, such as orally or filling in blanks, etc.
- Show the child how to use a bookmark to track current chapter or highlighter for key concepts.
- Divide long-term projects into segments and assign a completion goal for each segment (such as Confirmation Saint Projects).
- Assign a class aide to help the child stay on track and finish class work.



Organization

- Color-code materials for each section (Doctrine, Sacraments, Commandments and Prayers).
- Allow time for child to organize materials and assignments for home. Post steps for getting ready to go home.

Intervention: Dealing with disruptive classroom behavior and rewarding good behavior.

- To head off behavior that takes time from other children, work out a couple of warning signals with the child who has ADD/ADHD. This can be a hand signal, an unobtrusive shoulder squeeze, or a sticky note on the student's desk.
- If you must discuss the child's behavior, do so in private. And try to ignore mildly inappropriate behavior if it's unintentional and isn't distracting other children or disrupting the lesson.
- Reward good behavior. Congratulate your child when he or she completes each step of a task.
- Watch the child around his or her friends. It's sometimes hard for children who have ADHD to learn social skills. Reward good play behaviors.

Your most effective tool, however, is a positive attitude

Make the student your partner by saying, "Let's figure out ways together to help you get your work done." Assure the student that you'll be looking for good behavior and quality work, and when you see it, reinforce it with immediate and sincere praise. Finally, look for ways to motivate a student with ADD/ADHD by offering rewards on a point or token system.

LEARNING DISABILITIES

☐ Sensory ☐ Motor ☐ Intellectual ☒ Learning

Learning disabilities are characterized by a disconnect between the child's intelligence and the ability to learn.

There are no major tests to identify the causes or root problems of learning disabilities. The child whose achievement is substantially lower than their intelligence level may have a learning disability. This disorder affects the ability to read, to write and to do math.

CHARACTERISTICS

There are many definitions for learning disabilities but commonly there are four factors which may be observed in a child.

1. The child has an issue with academic learning.
2. There is an uneven pattern of development: language, physical activity (for example, coordination), academic ability or perception.
3. The environment (lack of good study space, for example), or physical disability do not impair learning.
4. There is a lack of academic connection but not due to intellectual disability or emotional disturbance.

Children with any of the following characteristics are usually defined as having a learning disability. Not all of the following have to exist:

- They need time to finish or process incoming information
- They do not understand the meaning of the words or sequence
- They have a difficult time doing group work
- They are not skilled in responding to questions or statements
- They miss non-verbal language cues
- They have a difficult time giving directions or following them
- They invert their letters or numbers

HELPFUL TIPS FOR CATECHISTS

There are many successful strategies to teach these children, and they can learn. The catechist has to break down the lessons to small units of learning and devise different methods of delivering the content. The teacher also needs to teach the children how to learn by modeling expected outcome.

The following strategies help the students learn:

- Use direct instruction
- Break learning into small steps
- Prompts can be helpful
- Give students regular positive feedback
- Use diagrams, graphics and pictures to supplement spoken teaching
- Ask questions
- Use scaffolding- build on the learning experience

Students can be very successful in the classroom once they learn what is expected of them. They benefit from a consistent approach to learning. Instruction has to be specific and directed. The catechist really should expect children with learning disabilities to learn: they can learn, and they can learn very well. The catechist would benefit from having a positive view of the child's ability to learn.

EMOTIONAL DISORDERS (ANXIETY)

The catechist may encounter children with anxiety disorder, particularly at the beginning of the year or catechetical program start.

CHARACTERISTICS

Anxiety disorder is characterized by discomfort in new situations, to the extent that the child may be unable to attend class or struggle to take in information when they are in the class. This disorder may lead to physical illness, behaviors such as temper tantrums, oppositional behaviors or the inability to be separated from a family member. Children may show signs of physical symptoms, such as shortness of breath, rapid heartbeat, upset stomach, defiance, or other manifestations.

HELPFUL TIPS FOR CATECHISTS

- Allow the parents to stay with the child in the classroom until the child feels confident enough with the environment.
- Minimize feelings of discomfort by welcoming the child to class, addressing the child by name and making a connection with the child.
- For a child with anxiety disorder, the personal connection and relationship is extremely important. The catechist should attempt to build a personal relationship with the child quickly.
- Initiate conversation, maintain conversation, listen to the child, and remember what the child has said. Follow up next time you see the child by asking about the topics of the prior conversation (family, school, catechetical topics, etc).
- Assign a classmate to be a mentor or classroom partner to assist the child in creating relationship and having a positive learning experience.

GENERAL PEDAGOGY TIPS

- Be patient!
- Be informed; take time to understand anxiety disorder and the child.
- Take time to know the children, speak to them directly and make eye contact.
- Allow the children time to respond to questions.
- Allow the children to speak without interruption, even if it takes a while to formulate their thoughts.
- Be a good listener. Acknowledge you understood what they said.
- Be accepting of children with special needs in the classroom, out of the classroom, and in the Church.

Section V

Curricular Considerations

One of the most difficult tasks for a parish catechetical leader when serving children with cognitive and developmental disabilities in a catechetical program is figuring out how to best serve these children.

- What kinds of lessons should they receive?
- What kinds of activities should they do?
- What would a class look like? What would the year look like?
- When is the child properly prepared to receive the Sacraments?

There are a few resources available for planning catechetical lessons and programs for children with autism or cognitive disabilities, and many publishers are creating catechetical resources for children with special needs. It is a good idea to stay alert to the release of new materials.

As a catechetical leader, you will find that the needs of each child can vary greatly. Almost all resources will need to be combined, adapted, or supplemented. It is a good idea to start with a resource and create lessons and activities based on the needs of the children in your program. You will find it is best to be flexible and adaptive with all resources and curriculum. Below are some available curriculum and program ideas.

OSV

Alive in Christ

Grades 1-6

This catechetical program is in a format that builds Catholic identity, involves families, and supports catechists and teachers with easy-to-use and effective tools. The program follows a three-step process of Invite, Discover, and Live. Alive in Christ naturally accommodates for different learning needs by including learning activities that appeal to multiple senses. In addition to the variety of activities in the children's books, the program website provides adaptations for every chapter, by page number and activity title. These integrated adaptations promote an inclusive classroom and provide support for children with different learning needs, including fine motor and writing difficulties, visual, reading and language challenges, difficulties with attention and impulse control, and intellectual/developmental delays.

aliveinchrist.osv.com

Encounter with Christ

Sacramental Preparation

This immediate sacrament preparation program for Confirmation, Eucharist, and Reconciliation has dynamic learning activities for ages 7-10 that engage multiple senses, and a website that provides adaptations for every session, by page number and activity title. These integrated adaptations promote an inclusive classroom and provide support for children with different learning needs, including fine motor and writing difficulties, visual, reading and language challenges, difficulties with attention and impulse control, and intellectual/developmental delays.

sacraments.osv.com

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

Books

Sacramental Preparation

The University of Dayton Institute for Pastoral Initiatives has published several books for the sacrament preparation of individuals with developmental disabilities, including “All About Mass”, “Who is Jesus?”, and resource binders and student books for Reconciliation, Confirmation and Eucharist.

Additional materials include books on the Apostles Creed, prayer, the Beatitudes, and the Blessed Mother. All materials use a minimum amount of wording, simple vocabulary, and lots of pictures and images. The resource binders for Reconciliation, Confirmation and Eucharist contain prayers, multi-sensory activity ideas and adapted scripture stories that use minimal wording and pictures, prayers.

LOYOLA PRESS

Both programs and kits can be purchased and come with visuals and already-made materials to serve children with developmental and cognitive disabilities.

Adaptive Finding God Program/Curriculum

Two levels

The program is an adaptation to Loyola Press’ Finding God curriculum, for use in special needs classrooms. There are two levels for the adaptive program. Both levels use hands-on and visual learning tools like stick puppets, foam puzzles, movement mats, flip books, and picture books. The programs are adaptable for parish use depending on student disability and needs.

- The Adapted Grade Level uses the Finding God curriculum and provides modifications and learning tools that make the lessons more concrete and multi-sensory. It is best for students who are in a typical setting but need lesson modifications.
- The Hands-on Level is best for students who benefit from one-on-one instruction.

Sacramental Preparation Kit

Sacramental Preparation

The kits use the same type of Learning Tools, but they are specific to the concepts relating to Reconciliation, Confirmation, and Eucharist. The Sacramental Preparation kits have hands-on material that are good for children with developmental disabilities like Autism. Each kit is a single-use kit for an individual child. The kits do not contain enough material for an entire year, but they would make a good addition to a program or would be good for families to repeat and reinforce concepts at home. The picture missal is especially helpful for families to take along to Mass. The language is very simple, with brightly colored pictures, a Mass Missal for the child, and a very helpful booklet with tips and suggestions for the parent or teacher.

ROSE FITZGERALD KENNEDY PROGRAM

Lesson plans

Ages 5-18, adults

The Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Program contains 220 lesson plans in a binder. It is designed for students ages 5-18 with mild or moderate intellectual disabilities, but can also be used with adults. This detailed curriculum covers the major doctrines of the Catholic faith, including God the Father, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, prayer, Mass, the liturgical seasons, Mary, the sacraments, and sacrament preparation. It breaks concepts down and concepts are built on one another.

Each lesson has a format which includes prayer, a lesson, an activity idea and closing. The lesson always begins with something that is familiar to students and then connects it with the concept for the lesson. For example, the lesson may begin by discussing celebrations, which are familiar to students, and connect that to the celebration of the Mass. It does not include materials for suggested activities or any visuals. It will need to be adapted for children with limited verbal communication.

Available through RCL Benzinger

COME FOLLOW ME

Catechesis

Ages 7-11

Come Follow Me was written in association with Catechists of the Diocese of Avignon and the Notre Dame de Vie Institute. The program spans 4 years, with each year containing 35 sessions 30-60 minutes in length.

The main principles of the program:

1. A call to love
2. A way of evangelization
3. In the footsteps of Christ
4. A school of love and faith
5. A life of communion in the church

This program naturally supports the inclusion of persons with special needs as it includes built in interaction in community with others, hands-on activities, and contemplation of scripture with individual prayer time built in. A student could fully participate in this catechetical program without needing to read or verbally participate. Additionally, the program provides multiple opportunities for multi-modal learning and participating in God's call to know our Lord in a deep, personal way.

www.comefollowme.info

CATECHESIS OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Catechetical method

Ages 3-12



Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS) is not an adaptive curriculum but an integral catechetical method to forming children ages 3-12 (grouped by age range). Many parishes in the Diocese of Phoenix utilize the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd method exclusively or extensively for children's catechesis. For this reason, CGS will be covered in greater depth.

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd utilizes a hands-on, multi-sensory approach to present scripture and liturgy in children's catechesis. Many children with special needs can attend CGS with minimal adaptation. The method is based on the Montessori principles of education which uses hands on materials to allow children to explore and discover concepts on their own.

Specialized space and materials are needed to implement CGS in the parish.

The following are the aspects of this method which could be beneficial for children with various disabilities:

- The class sizes are kept small, typically 10 to 15 children depending on their age. Class size is adjusted if a child with disabilities is present to allow a more appropriate child/teacher ratio.
- Presentations are kept short, which is helpful for children with shorter attention spans, and include the opportunity for the child to interact with the materials presented.
- Presentations are usually given in small groups of 4 to 6 children and can be given individually. Presentations to the children include materials that they can move and interact, engaging all five senses.
- There is freedom for children to choose material to work with during part of the time they are in the Atrium.
- There is a repeated rhythm to each session which gives the children a sense of stability (work, presentation, work and prayer response).
- There is a quiet, peaceful tone in the Atrium, as well as an organized environment, which assists children with autism and/or processing disorders.
- New concepts are presented in small increments, giving children time to process them and then in later presentations the concepts will go deeper as they are ready.
- At the beginning of each presentation, they are given an opportunity to restate and review what they already know. This helps the child who needs more repetition.



- There is flexibility built into the time, making it easier to allow children to enter situations at their own pace and when they are ready. They may need to sit at a table behind the group during a presentation and do something with their hands while they are listening.
- Hand and body gestures are used during singing, enabling children to use the body to help draw into prayer.
- Adaptations are made for children who have difficulty in reading.

More information on this method and information on training courses for implementing this method can be found at www.cgsusa.org.

Specific disabilities assisted by the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd Atrium:



- **ADHD:** CGS is hands on, giving children freedom to choose their own work, allowing them to concentrate more deeply since they choose what they are most drawn to.
- **Autism:** The atrium is structured, with a predictable rhythm. The material and environment draw children with autism out of themselves; they work consistently on various projects (called “works”) from week to week until completion.
- **Down Syndrome and Intellectual Disabilities:** Much of the material does not require reading or writing.
- **Physical impairments:** The atrium (classroom) set up remains constant throughout the entire year; if it is set up to be adaptive to physical handicaps once, it will remain that way all year.

Inclusivity in the Atrium:

The Atrium has multi-age groupings (3-6yrs, 6-9yrs, 9-12yrs), making it easier to place a child with a mental disability in with children closer to their mental age. The catechist may need an appropriate size table and chair if the child is larger than the typical children in the room. Caution is recommended: there may be a time when it is not safe or appropriate to place a much older child with younger children, regardless of similarity in mental ability.

Tips for Catechists if a child with a disability is having difficulty settling into the rhythm and tone of the Atrium:

- The child can stay for half the class, either the first half or the final half.
- If helpful, a parent can be asked to stay with the child.
- An assistant or aide can be requested to assist the child. Sometimes a child will have a respite aid during class time.
- The child can continue to work during group time until he or she is ready to participate.
- The presentations can be done individually to the child, or if time does not permit, the child can come in early he or she will be able to work with the material in the Atrium.
- You may consider having a separate, small session for children with special needs, with enough assistants to keep it peaceful and beneficial to all the children.

Resources

STATEMENTS AND GUIDELINES

- **Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities**
<http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/catechesis/upload/guidelines-for-sacraments-disabilities.pdf>
- **Pastoral Statement of U.S. Catholic Bishops on Persons with Disabilities**
<http://www.ncpd.org/views-news-policy/policy/church/bishops/pastoral/>
- **Welcoming People with Disabilities so All May Encounter Christ**
http://www.ncpd.org/sites/default/files/disability-booklet-1-2-13-smaller_0.pdf
(Diocese of Harrisburg, PA, 2012).
- **Guiding Principles and Strategies for inclusion in the Liturgy of Catholics with Disabilities**
<http://www.disabilitiesandfaith.org/resources/guidebooks/GuidingPrinciplesInclusionLiturgy.pdf>
(Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions. Liturgical Arts and Music Committee, August 25, 2005).
- **Affirming the Dignity of the Mentally Ill** (from the Nebraska Bishop's Conference)
<http://necatholic.org/document-category/bishops-statements/>
- **Message of St. Pope John Paul II to the International Symposium on the Dignity and Rights of the Mentally Disabled Person**
https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2004/january/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20040108_handicap-mentale.html
- **Tips for working with a special needs child**
<http://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2012/10/15/8-important-tips-for-working-with-a-special-needs-child/>
- **Knights of Columbus**
<http://www.kofc.org>
Find your local council. Proceeds from their annual Tootsie Roll Drive and other efforts support efforts helping those with intellectual disabilities

BOOKS

HOW TO WELCOME, INCLUDE AND CATECHIZE CHILDREN WITH AUTISM AND OTHER SPECIAL NEEDS

by Deacon Larry Sutton, PhD.

Deacon Larry Sutton developed an individualized catechetical method, utilized in his parish in Pittsburgh, PA, for over 15 years. This approach involves 1-to-1 instruction for the special needs child with a teen faith mentor. The mentors are trained to work with children who have Autism, and they follow lessons created by the program coordinator or catechetical leader.

The use of teen mentors, who are close to the child's age, has had several benefits. Children are enabled to learn at their own pace, mastering each lesson to the extent of their ability before moving on to the next. Deacon Sutton maintains that meeting 1-on-1 with a near peer makes it easier for the student to develop a good relationship with the mentor. This relationship fosters a true sense of belonging to the faith community of the parish, and the larger Church.

The basic routine follows this structure:

- The students and mentors meet in a space with minimal distractions, and have a short time as a group with an opening prayer and song.
- Then the group splits up with teen mentors for 1-on-1 lessons, ending with a review and prayers.
- The Mentor will speak with parents about the catechesis and follow up work at home.

HANDBOOK FOR ADAPTIVE CATECHESIS: SERVING THOSE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

by Michele Chronister

The book covers a variety of topics, such as identifying common disabilities, strategies to use in working with children who have those disabilities, speaking with parents, identifying students with disabilities, recruiting catechists, planning lessons, and creative strategies for catechists in typical catechetical classrooms.

LEARNING ABOUT LEARNING DISABILITIES

by Bernice Wong

This book provides information on the intellectual, conceptual, and practical aspects of learning disabilities. The Fourth Edition of this popular title presents 80% new material, keeping the chapters up to date in this fast-moving field.

TEACHING STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES: A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

by Roger Pierangelo

This book addresses in detail all the possible processing weaknesses and provides strategies to help a student access the general education curriculum, and provides the reader with a very clear understanding of the student with learning disabilities.

HOW TO DIFFERENTIATE INSTRUCTION IN MIXED-ABILITY CLASSROOMS

by Carol Ann Tomlinson

Information provided includes three new chapters (2nd edition), extended examples and information in every chapter, and field-tested strategies that teachers can use in today's increasingly diverse classrooms. Tomlinson shows how to use students' readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles to address student diversity.

INCLUDING STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS: A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR CLASSROOM TEACHERS

by Marilyn Friend

This widely used inclusion text (now in its 6th edition) is an excellent source of practical strategies for teaching students with special needs in inclusive settings. Filled with examples and vignettes, the emphasis is always on teaching methods that promote student independence at all education levels.

LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS

RAISING SPECIAL KIDS

Raising Special Kids is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization that provides support and information for parents of children, from birth to age 26, with a full range of disabilities and special health care needs. Programs are offered at no cost to families, and are available in English and Spanish. Raising Special Kids began in 1979 as a grass-roots effort of families, professionals, and community leaders determined to provide support and information for parents of children with disabilities and special health care needs.

Website: www.raisingspecialkids.org

Address: Raising Special Kids- Phoenix Office
5025 E. Washington St. #204, Phoenix, AZ 85034

Phone: (602) 242-4366 / Email: info@raisingspecialkids.org

HOPE KIDS

HopeKids provides ongoing events, activities and a powerful, unique support community for families who have a child with a life-threatening medical condition. They offer unique adventures and programs for the whole family.

Website: www.hopekids.org

Address: National Office
PO Box 28471, Scottsdale, AZ 85255

Phone: (800) 319-5845 / Email: info@hopekids.org

THE MOLLY LAWSON FOUNDATION

Improvement of the life of persons with disabilities, through providing financial resources to help give opportunities and experiences to mentally handicapped individuals in the community.

Website: www.mollylawson.org

Address: 5822 N 22nd Pl., Phoenix, AZ 85016

Phone: (602) 955-8654 / Email:

doris.lawson@mollylawson.org



Hope Kids Day 2017 at Notre Dame Preparatory

SOUTHWEST AUTISM RESEARCH AND RESOURCE CENTER (SARRC)

Numerous programs for people with autism and their families, including a six-week training for newly diagnosed children, a preschool for children, training for a person with autism to help them get a job, and programs to help train teachers and/or any professionals. The goal is to advance research and provide a lifetime of support for individuals with autism and their families.

Website: <http://www.autismcenter.org/>

Address: 300 N. 18th St., Phoenix, AZ 85006

Phone: (602) 340-8717 / Email: sarrc@autismcenter.org

FOUNDATION FOR BLIND CHILDREN

The Foundation for Blind Children is a community resource for blind, visually impaired, and multi-handicapped children, adults, and their families. The Foundation serves as the community's resource for blind, visually impaired, and multi-handicapped children, adults, and their families, and has three Valley locations (East Valley, West Valley and Central Phoenix).



Website: <https://www.seeitourway.org/>

Address: 1234 E. Northern Ave., Phoenix, AZ 85020

Phone: (602) 331-1470, 800-322-4870 / Email:

info@seeitourway.org

ARIZONA SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF AND BLIND

Arizona State Schools for the Deaf and the Blind provides a full continuum of educational opportunities via Statewide and Campus services. They help provide education for all children throughout Arizona who are hard of hearing, deaf or have vision loss, through collaboration with families, school districts, communities, and partnership with other agencies that will enable children who are hard of hearing, deaf or have vision loss to succeed now and in the future.

Campuses exist across the state, including in Phoenix, Tucson, as well as regional cooperatives. Full site lists available on the website.

Website: <https://asdb.az.gov/asdb/>

Address: 800 W. Washington St., Phoenix, AZ 85007

Phone: (602) 771-5347

MELMED CENTER

The Melmed Center provides a compassionate, state of the art approach to the assessment and treatment of behavioral, educational and developmental challenges in children and adults. The goal of the Melmed Center is to provide family-centered care and support for the family and the child. Each child has a core team usually made up of a nurse practitioner, a developmental pediatrician, and the parents.

Website: www.melmedcenter.com

Address: 4848 E. Cactus Rd., Ste. #940, Scottsdale, AZ 85254

Phone: (480) 443-0050

RAINBOW ACRES

This is a Christian residential community for adults with developmental disabilities.

Website: www.rainbowacres.com

Phone: (928) 567-5231 / Email: info@rainbowacres.com

NEUROLOGIC MUSIC THERAPY SERVICES OF ARIZONA

NMTSA's mission is to change the lives of individuals with disabilities through innovative and dynamic programs, education, and collaborations. NMTSA offers a variety of unique trainings for free to families, caregivers and professionals, and has an Information Empowerment Center that provides free access to a variety of resources and research articles related to disabilities, autism, down syndrome, traumatic brain injury, etc.

Website: www.nmtsa.org

Address: 2702 N. Third St., Suite 1000, Phoenix, AZ 85004

Phone: (602) 840-6410 / Email: info@nmtsa.org

EMPOWERMENT SCHOLARSHIP ACCOUNT (ESA)

An Empowerment Scholarship Account (ESA) is an account established to provide an education for qualified students. ESA provides options for parents to freely choose how and where to educate their children with financial assistance available from the state.

Website: www.azed.gov/esa/

www.azed.gov/esa/files/2011/09/e-s-a-brochure-finished-copy.pdf

Address: 1535 W. Jefferson St., Bin# 41, Phoenix, AZ 85007

Phone: (602) 364-1969 / Email: esa@azed.gov

SILVER TREE

Offers key financial planning to families of children and adults with disabilities:

- Legal advice (help with a will, family trust, special needs trust, and/or guardianship)
- Government benefits (cash, medical benefits, social security)
- Financial planning and budgeting (especially ensuring financial support for the disabled person after the death of his/her parents)

They specialize in providing long term planning to help ensure that the future of the person with special needs is safe and secure.

Website: www.silvertreesnp.com/

Address: 14555 N. Scottsdale Rd. #200, Scottsdale, AZ 85254

Phone: (866) 949-6202 / Email: info@silvertreesnp.com

FAITH AND LIGHT GROUP

ST. JOSEPH PARISH

Offers monthly fellowship for children with an intellectual disability and their family.

Website: www.stjoephx.org/Faith-and-Light

Address: 11001 N. 40th St., Phoenix, AZ 85028

Phone: (602) 996-5120

NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS (USCCB)

The USCCB is an assembly of the hierarchy of the United States and the U.S. Virgin Islands who jointly exercise certain pastoral functions on behalf of the Christian faithful of the United States. The mission is:

- 1) To act collaboratively and consistently on vital issues confronting the Church and society
- 2) To foster communion with the Church in other nations, within the Church universal, under the leadership of its supreme pastor, the Roman Pontiff
- 3) To offer appropriate assistance to each bishop in fulfilling his particular ministry in the local Church.

Website: www.usccb.org

Address: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
3211 Fourth St. NE, Washington, DC 20017

Phone: (202) 541-3000

NATIONAL CATHOLIC PARTNERSHIP ON DISABILITY (NCPD)

The National Catholic Partnership on Disability (NCPD) works collaboratively to ensure meaningful participation of people with disabilities in all aspects of the life of the Church and society. It is rooted in Gospel values that affirm the dignity of every person.

Website: www.ncpd.org/

Address: 415 Michigan Ave. NE, Suite 95, Washington, DC 20017-4501

Phone: (202) 529-2934 / Email: ncpd@ncpd.org

XAVIER SOCIETY FOR THE BLIND

The Xavier Society for the Blind provides the best of Roman Catholic teaching and literature, spiritual and inspirational material, to blind or visually impaired persons of any faith in whatever format best meets their needs at no charge. It also offers opportunities for volunteer service for those who wish to help in this work through their donation of time, talent or financial support.

Website: www.xaviersocietyfortheblind.org/index.php

Address: Two Penn Plaza, Suite 1102, New York, NY 10121

Phone: (212) 473-7800 / (800) 637-9193 / Email: info@xaviersocietyfortheblind.org

NATIONAL CATHOLIC OFFICE FOR THE DEAF (NCOD)

The National Catholic Office for the Deaf has the mission of spreading support of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Pastoral Ministry, and raising the national consciousness concerning ministry for and to Deaf and Hard of Hearing people.

Website: www.ncod.org/index

Email: Info@ncod.org

INSTITUTE FOR PASTORAL INITIATIVES

The Institute for Pastoral Initiatives, housed at the University of Dayton, creates and implements innovative pastoral initiatives designed to meet the needs of the Church and to articulate faith within the context of contemporary culture.

Website: www.udayton.edu/artssciences/ctr/ipi/index.php

Address: University of Dayton, Institute for Pastoral Initiatives

300 College Park, Dayton, OH 45469

Phone: (937) 229-3126 / Email: jchaffin1@udayton.edu

HARRIS COMMUNICATION

Assistive technologies designed to help all individuals live more independently and help them communicate more freely at home, work and leisure, through M. Harris Communication (ASL technology and book supplier).

Website: www.harriscomm.com/

DIOCESAN AND ARCHDIOCESAN RESOURCES

OFFICE OF FAMILY CATECHESIS

Diocese of Phoenix, AZ

Support, resources, training and parish consultations in special needs and disabilities ministry.

Website: <http://dphx.org/evangelizing-persons-with-disabilities/>

CENTER FOR DEAF MINISTRIES

Archdiocese of Washington, DC

Houses St. Francis of Assisi Deaf Catholic Church which functions on a Parish Model. This parish serves Gallaudet University, the only liberal arts college for the Deaf in the world.

Website: <http://adw.org/center-deaf-ministry/>

OFFICE OF CATHOLIC DEAF MINISTRY

Archdiocese of Portland, OR

Its mission supports and encourages Deaf Catholic people in their faith lives.

Website: www.archdpdx.org/deaf/

CATHOLIC OFFICE OF THE DEAF

Archdiocese of Chicago

An agency of the Archdiocese of Chicago that provides for the pastoral, spiritual, religious education, and social justice issues of Deaf and Hard of Hearing people in metropolitan Chicago.

Website: <http://deafchurchchicago.weconnect.com/>

DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING RESOURCES

INTERPRETED MASSES

A current list of the Diocese of Phoenix Interpreted Masses is available through the Office of Family Catechesis.

Website: <http://dphx.org/asl-interpreted-catholic-masses-phoenix-arizona/>

Phone: (602) 354-2321 / Email: agaetano@diocesephoenix.org

VALLEY CENTER OF THE DEAF (VCD)

VCD is a Metro Phoenix Community Service. It seeks to “fill the gaps” by providing services which are not available elsewhere, and is funded by Catholic Community Services of Southern Arizona, Inc.

Website: www.vcdaz.org

Address: 5025 E. Washington St., Suite #114, Phoenix, AZ 85034

Phone: Voice: (602) 267-1921 TTY: (602) 267-9122 Videophone: (623) 208-4349

Email: interpreting@vcdaz.org

COMMUNITY OUTREACH PROGRAM FOR THE DEAF (COPD)

A Metro Tucson Community Service

Community Outreach Program for the Deaf (COPD) provides services throughout Arizona to persons with a hearing loss. COPD is considered a grassroots organization partnering with Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deaf-Blind persons and organizations in establishing services and providing a “one-stop” center for persons with a hearing loss. As part of Catholic Community Services, COPD is well into its fourth decade, serving hundreds of Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deaf-Blind persons each year.

Website: www.copdaz.org

Address: 268 W. Adams St., Tucson, AZ 85705

Phone: (520) 792-1906 / Email: request@copdaz.org

ARIZONA COMMISSION FOR THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING

Established in 1977, ACDHH is a state agency that serves as a statewide information referral center for issues related to people with hearing loss.

Website: www.acdhh.org

Address: 100 N. 15th Ave., Suite 104, Phoenix, AZ 85007

Phone: Voice: (602) 542-3323, Video Phone: (480) 559-9441 / Email: info@acdhh.az.gov

Also see “Diocesan and Archdiocesan Resources” on previous page

ARIZONA SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF AND BLIND

Arizona State Schools for the Deaf and the Blind provides a full continuum of educational opportunities via Statewide and Campus services. They help provide education for all children throughout Arizona who are hard of hearing, deaf or have vision loss, through collaboration with families, school districts, communities, and partnership with other agencies that will enable children who are hard of hearing, deaf or have vision loss to succeed now and in the future.

Campuses exist across the state, including in Phoenix, Tucson, as well as regional cooperatives. Full site lists available on the website.

Website: <https://asdb.az.gov/asdb/>

Address: 800 W. Washington St., Phoenix, AZ 85007

Phone: (602) 771-5347

HANDS & VOICES METRO PHOENIX

Hands & Voices is a non-profit, parent-driven organization dedicated to supporting families of children who are deaf or hard of hearing. It is a parent-driven, parent/professional collaborative group that is unbiased towards communication modes and methods.

Website: www.handsandvoices.org/index.htm

Address: PO Box 30163, Phoenix, AZ 85046

Phone: (866) 685-1050 / Email: president@azhv.org

WEB-BASED RESOURCES

- Father Mike Depcik's weekly vlog in American Sign Language.
Website: www.frmd.org/
- Assistive technologies designed to help all individuals live more independently and help them communicate more freely at home, work and leisure, through M. Harris Communication (ASL technology and book supplier).
Website: www.harriscomm.com/
- American Sign Language and Deaf culture-related DVDs and books
Website: www.dawnsign.com/
- [Religious Signing: A Comprehensive Guide for All Faiths](#), is a dictionary of ASL signs with all the ASL vocabulary needed to communicate effectively in any religious setting.



Section VII

Appendix

“Parish liturgical celebrations and catechetical programs should be accessible to persons with disabilities and open to their full, active, and conscious participation, according to their capacity.”

*-Welcome and Justice for Persons with Disabilities
1998*

SAMPLE BULLETIN ANNOUNCEMENTS

“All children with disabilities are welcome in our Religious Education program. In fact, it is not complete without every child.

Please call (Name) at (Number) to plan for accommodations or speak with us when registering your child(ren).”

“The parish of (Name) welcomes and includes children with disabilities into our catechetical program. We are in need of volunteers to help provide an education in the faith for children with disabilities. Opportunities include acting as an aide for a child in the catechetical classroom, assisting in a smaller catechetical session designed for children with developmental disabilities, being available as a substitute aide, and preparing special materials.

Experience is not necessary but helpful. Training provided. If you are interested in this rewarding ministry, please contact (Name) at (Number).”

SAMPLE CONTENT FOR THE PARISH WEBSITE

Special Education Catechesis

(Parish name) welcomes all children into the catechetical program. Catechetical instruction, including sacrament preparation, is made accessible to children with disabilities by providing appropriate accommodations.

Possible Accommodations:

- Support and strategies for a child in a regular catechetical class
- An additional classroom aide for a student in a regular catechetical class (can be a relative, a child’s respite or habilitation provider, or a volunteer parishioner)
- Pull-out instruction in a one-on-one or small group setting
- Participation in a separate Special Education catechetical class

Special Education Catechetical classes

These classes are designed for students who are not served well in a regular class due to an intellectual or developmental disability. The benefits of the special education class include:

- Small class size
- Low student-teacher ratio
- A consistent routine and schedule board with pictures
- Simplified concepts, simplified language, and repetition
- The heavy use of visuals and hands-on activities, including music

SAMPLE VOLUNTEER CONTENT

**For bulletin and/or website
(for web) consider a teaser image/ad on home page**

Volunteers are always needed to work with students who have disabilities in regular classes, in one-on-one instruction, and in the special education classes. Experience is helpful but not necessary.

Contact:

(Program Administrator)

(Phone Number)

(Email)

FORMS TO IDENTIFY SPECIAL NEED/ACCOMMODATION

- **Registration Form** [Sample Page 89](#)
Use parish's standard religious education form with added space for "Does your child have any special needs?"
- **Registration Health Form** [Sample Page 91](#)
Use if the answer to the question, "Does your child have any special needs?" is Yes
- **Student Information Form** [Sample Page 92](#) y [En Español Pagina 97](#)
Recommended if the form indicates significant disabilities. It is best to fill out with parents and child both present, so you can personally observe the child.
This form is also available in Spanish.
- **Placement Form** [Sample Page 102](#)
Recommended for condensing information received into usable reference guide for the catechist/aide to keep on hand.

+ Sample Catechesis Registration Form +

Please write the information exactly as it appears on the child's birth certificate

Child's Name/Nombre del Estudiante:

Home Address/ Dirección:

Home Phone/ Teléfono de Casa: _____ **Cell Phone /** Celular: _____

Family email/ Correo electrónico: _____

Child's Date of Birth/Fecha de Nacimiento del niño/joven:_____

Grade in School Fall 2017/ Grado en escuela en otoño 2017: _____ **Age/Edad:** _____

Child's Place of Birth/Lugar de Nacimiento del niño_____

Country (País)

SACRAMENTAL INFORMATION FOR THE CHILD/ INFORMACIÓN SACRAMENTAL DE SU HIJO(A):

*Please provide a copy of your child's baptismal certificate to our office as soon as possible if you haven't already done so.

*Por favor, provee una copia del certificado de bautizo de su hijo a la oficina lo más pronto posible, si todavía no lo haya hecho.

Has your child been baptized?/¿Su hijo(a) ha sido bautizado(a)? Yes/Sí ☐ No ☐

When/Fecha? _____
Month/year

Where/Dónde? _____
Mes/Año *City/State/Country* *Estado/País*

Has your child been Confirmed?/ ¿Su hijo(a) ya ha sido Confirmado? Yes/Sí ☐ No ☐

When/Fecha? _____ Where/Dónde? _____

Has your child received First Communion?/¿Su hijo(a) ya recibió la Primera Comunión? Yes/Sí ☐ No ☐

When?/Fecha? _____
Month/year Mes/Año

Where Dónde? _____
City/State/Country Estado/País

ABOUT THE CHILD / INFORMACIÓN ADICIONAL DE SU HIJO/A

Does your child have any special needs? (Physical disabilities, ADHD, hearing/vision impaired, etc.)

¿Su hijo(a) tiene necesidades especiales o está en clases especiales? Yes/Sí ☐ No ☐

Choose the schedule for your child's class / Escoja el horario de clase para su hijo/a:

SUNDAY: English ☐ 9:30AM - 10:45AM Catechesis for students in Kindergarten through High School

SÁBADO: Español ☐ 4:00PM - 5:00PM Catequesis en español para jóvenes de Kinder-High School
5:15PM - 6:15PM Asistencia a la Santa Misa de Padres e Hijos

FAMILY INFORMATION / INFORMACIÓN DE LA FAMILIA

FATHER'S INFORMATION/SOBRE EL PADRE **Preferred Language** (Please circle): English Spanish
 Name: _____ Sacraments: ☐ Baptism ☐ Communion ☐ Confirmation ☐ Catholic Marriage

MOTHER'S INFORMATION/ SOBRE LA MADRE Preferred Language (Please circle): English Spanish

Name: _____ Sacraments: ___ Baptism ___ Communion ___ Confirmation ___ Catholic Marriage

Student lives with: ☐ Parents ☐ Mother Only ☐ Father Only ☐ Other (please explain): _____

Names of other children <i>Nombres de los otros hijos</i>	Age <i>Edad</i>	Registered in R.E? <i>Inscrito en la catequesis</i>	Baptized? <i>Bautizo?</i>	First Communion? <i>Primera Comunión?</i>	Confirmed? <i>Confirmación?</i>
_____	_____	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No
_____	_____	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No
_____	_____	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No

FAMILY FAITH INFORMATION / SOBRE LA FAMILIA

Please indicate which of the choices below most accurately reflects your current faith practice **as a family**:

☐ Not currently attending Sunday (or Saturday pm) Mass and Confession as a family with any regularity. *Como familia, no asistimos con regularidad a la Misa del domingo (o sábado de noche).*

☐ Seeking as a family to begin a more faithful practice of our faith for the first time. *Buscando como familia a comenzar a practicar la Fe de manera fiel por primera vez.*

☐ Seeking as a family to return to a more faithful practice of our faith after some time away. *Buscando como familia a retornar a una práctica fiel de nuestra Fe después de un tiempo de no ser muy fiel.*

☐ Currently attending Sunday (or Saturday pm) Mass fairly often, and Confession less often than yearly. *Como familia, asistimos a la Misa de domingo/sábado de noche a menudo, y a la Confesión menos que una vez al año.*

☐ Currently attending Sunday (or Saturday pm) Mass most weeks, and Confession at least once a year. *Como familia, asistimos a la Misa de domingo/sábado de noche casi todas las semanas y a la Confesión por lo menos una vez al año.*

☐ Currently attending Sunday (or Saturday pm) Mass as family every week, and Confession more than once a year. *Asistimos a la Misa del domingo/sábado de noche todas las semanas y a la Confesión más que una vez al año.*

If money is a problem, please speak with us. No child will be turned away because of financial reasons. Si el costo es un problema, por favor hable con nosotras. A ningún niño se le negará la catequesis por motivos de dinero.

Fee per Student:	\$75 each /a cada uno	Costo por Estudiante
Family Fee (3 or more children)	\$150 total	Precio de familia, 3 o más hermanos
Out of Parish / Non registered	+\$100	Familias NO inscritas en la parroquia
Family Late Fee (after August 4, 2014)	+\$25.00	Recargo por mora (Por familia)
Volunteer Discount	\$50 each student /a cada estudiante	Descuento para voluntarios
How many children registering today? _____		
How many receiving sacraments in 2018? _____		

Registration Health Form

To best accommodate the needs of your child, indicate if your child has any of the following conditions. For any checked responses, please further explain your child's difficulties and needs. You may receive a follow-up call to gather more information.

Child's Name _____

Please check all that apply to your child:

Allergies ☐ _____

Seizures ☐ _____
please provide seizure health plan if needed

Autism Spectrum Disorder ☐ _____

Intellectual Disability ☐ _____

ADD / ADHD ☐ _____

Behavioral or Emotional Difficulties ☐ _____

Specific Learning Disability ☐ _____

What type? Reading Writing Other

Speech/Language Impairment ☐ _____

Hearing or Visual Impairment ☐ _____

Physical Impairment ☐ _____

Other Health Concerns ☐ _____

Sample Special Religious Education Student Information Form

Please take some time to fill out the following information to help us better understand your child. All information will remain confidential and will be used only within the Religious Education Department to provide the best possible accommodations. Thank you.

Date _____

Child's name _____

Date of Birth _____ Age _____ Grade _____

Parents/Guardians _____

Phone (home) _____ (other) _____

Address _____

E-mail _____

Child's Disability (if any) _____

What type of classroom is your child in at school? (i.e., regular ed, special education) _____

What accommodations or resources does your child receive at school (How do they help at school)?

Which of the following sacraments has your child ALREADY received?

____ Baptism ____ Reconciliation ____ Confirmation ____ Holy Communion

Please check all those that apply.

Expressive Communication

____ My child has **no** difficulty with verbal communication

____ My child's speech is difficult to understand

____ My child has limited verbal communication and:

____ uses complete sentences but has limited vocabulary

____ uses sentences but struggles with pragmatics (rules for social language)

____ uses only brief sentences or phrases ____ gives mostly one word responses

____ gives yes/no responses ____ uses little to no verbal language

____ other _____

____ My child communicates non-verbally through:

____ fluent American Sign Language (ASL) ____ a communication board

____ limited ASL vocab or other gestures ____ pictures

____ my child has no means of communication

Receptive Communication (*understanding language*)

____ Does your child understand and follow directions?

____ YES ____ SOMETIMES ____ NO

____ Does your child understand age appropriate vocabulary?

____ YES ____ SOMETIMES ____ NO

____ Does your child follow and understand age appropriate stories?

____ YES ____ SOMETIMES ____ NO

Reading

____ My child has **no** difficulty reading

____ My child is not reading at grade level; he/she is reading at a _____ grade level (*if known*)

____ My child has difficulty with reading comprehension

Writing

____ My child has **no** difficulty writing

____ My child is not writing at grade level and needs:

____ more time when writing

____ assistance when writing

____ someone to write for him/her

Mobility/Movement

____ My child has **no** difficulty with mobility or movement

____ My child has difficulty with movement and/or getting around; Explain _____

____ My child uses the following mobility aide(s):

____ wheelchair with no need for assistance ____ braces

____ wheelchair with need for assistance ____ crutches

____ walker ____ cane ____ other

Fine Motor (**movements of the hands and fingers**)

____ My child does **not** have difficulty with fine motor tasks (i.e., cutting, writing, using utensils)

____ My child has difficulty with fine motor tasks; Explain _____

Hearing

____ My child has **no** hearing problems

____ My child has partial hearing

____ My child is deaf and

____ his/her primary language is American Sign Language (ASL)

____ he/she reads lips

Vision

____ My child has **no** vision problems

____ My child is visually impaired and needs:

____ materials in large print, Braille, or on CD (*circle formats appropriate for your child*)

____ orientation to the classroom environment

____ assistance moving around the classroom and other areas

Behavior/Social/Emotional

Does your child have difficulty interacting with peers? ____YES ____NO

If so, explain. _____

Is your child easily distracted? ____YES ____NO

-- If so, what types of things are most distracting to your child?

____ Visual stimuli

____ Activity around him/her

____ Sounds

____ Other _____

-- What are good ways to keep his/her attention? _____

-- What is the best way to help your child regain his/her focus? _____

Is your child hyperactive? ____YES ____SOMETIMES ____NO

Does your child sometimes become aggressive? ____YES ____NO

If so, explain. _____

Does your child easily become agitated or emotionally upset? ____YES ____NO

-- If so, what type of events can trigger this behavior? _____

-- How will we know if your child is becoming agitated or emotionally upset? _____

-- What can we do to help him/her calm down or to relieve anxiety? _____

Medical

Does your child have any allergies? ____YES ____NO

If yes, explain _____

Describe any other relevant medical information or needs. _____

Bathroom Skills

____ Independent

____ Needs some assistance... Explain _____

____ Needs total assistance

General

What would you like for your child during this year of religious education?

Describe any worries or concerns about this year of religious education.

List some of the strengths, skills, or gifts you think your child has.

With what does your child need the most help?

What does your child enjoy the most?

What does your child enjoy the least?

What are some strategies that are successful when working with your child (including the best ways to teach him/her something new)?

What strategies do not work?

Is there any additional information you would like to share (include any sensory issues or self-stimulatory behaviors)?

Thank you for your time in completing this form.

Educación Religiosa Especial

Formulario de Información del Estudiante

Por favor tómese el tiempo de llenar la siguiente información para entender y ayudar mejor a su hijo. Toda la información será confidencial y se utilizará únicamente en el Departamento de Educación Religiosa para ofrecer las mejores comodidades posibles. Gracias.

Fecha _____

Nombre del niño: _____

Fecha de Nacimiento _____ Edad _____ Grado _____

Los padres / tutores: _____

Teléfono (casa) _____ (otra) _____

Dirección _____

E-mail _____

Discapacidad del niño(a) (si tiene) _____

¿Qué tipo de clase tiene su hijo en la escuela? (es decir, educación regular, educación especial)

¿Qué adaptaciones o recursos recibe su hijo en la escuela (¿Cómo lo ayudan en la escuela)?

¿Cuál de los siguientes sacramentos ha recibido?

____ Bautismo ____ Reconciliación/Confesión ____ Confirmación ____ Sagrada Comunión

Por favor, marque todas las que apliquen.

Comunicación expresiva

____ Mi hijo(a) **no** tiene ninguna dificultad con la comunicación verbal

____ Cuando habla es difícil de entenderle

____ Mi hijo(a) es limitado con la comunicación verbal y:

____ Usa frases completas, pero tiene un vocabulario limitado

____ Usa frases, pero lucha con la pragmática (reglas para el lenguaje social)

____ Utiliza sólo oraciones o frases breves ____ sus respuestas son de una sola palabra

____ Da respuestas sí / no ____ utiliza poco o ningún lenguaje verbal

____ Otra

___ Mi hijo(a) se comunica a través de:

___ fluidez American Sign Language (ASL)

___ un tablero de comunicación

___ vocabulario limitado ASL u otros gestos

___ fotos / dibujos

___ Mi hijo(a) no tiene ningún medio de comunicación

Comunicación receptiva (comprensión del lenguaje)

___ ¿Entiende y sigue instrucciones?

___ Sí ___ A VECES NO ___

___ ¿Entiende el vocabulario adecuado a su edad?

___ Sí ___ A VECES NO ___

___ ¿Entiende historias o cuentos apropiadas para su edad?

___ Sí ___ A VECES NO ___

Lectura

___ Mi niño(a) **no** tiene dificultades para leer

___ No está leyendo al nivel de su grado; él / ella está leyendo en un nivel de grado _____

___ Mi hijo(a) tiene dificultad con la comprensión de lectura

Escritura

___ Mi niño(a) **no** tiene dificultad para escribir

___ Mi hijo(a) no escribe al nivel de su grado y sus necesidades:

___ Más tiempo al escribir

___ Asistencia al escribir

___ Alguien que escriba por él / ella

Motricidad Gruesa / Movimiento

___ Mi hijo(a) **no** tiene dificultad con la motricidad gruesa o movimiento

___ Mi hijo(a) tiene dificultad con el movimiento y / o moverse; Explique _____

___ Mi hijo(a) usa lo siguiente para ayudarse:

___ Silla de ruedas sin necesidad de apoyos

___ aparato ortopédico

___ Silla de ruedas con necesidad de muletas

___ muletas

___ andadera

___ bastón

___ otra _____

Habilidades Motoras Finas (movimientos de las manos y los dedos)

___ Mi hijo(a) **no** tiene dificultad con las *habilidades motoras finas* (es decir: recortando, escribiendo, el uso de utensilios)

___ Mi hijo(a) tiene dificultad con las habilidades *motoras finas*; Explique: _____

Audición

___ Mi hijo(a) **no** tiene problemas de audición

___ Mi hijo tiene audición parcial

___ Mi hijo es sordo y

___ Su idioma principal es el lenguaje de señas americano (ASL)

___ Él / ella lee los labios

Visión

___ Mi hijo(a) **no** tiene problemas de visión

___ Mi hijo tiene una discapacidad visual y necesita:

___ Materiales en letra grande, Braille, o en CD (formatos círculo adecuados)

___ Orientación hacia el entorno del aula

___ Asistencia moviéndose por el aula y otras áreas

Comportamiento / Social / Emocional

¿Su hijo tiene dificultades para relacionarse con sus compañeros? ___ SÍ ___ NO

Si es así, explique.

¿Su hijo(a) se distrae con facilidad? ___ SÍ ___ NO

--- Si es así, ¿qué tipo de cosas son las que más causan distracción para su hijo(a)?

___ Los estímulos visuales

___ Actividad a su alrededor

___ Sonidos

___ Otro _____

--- ¿Qué modos debemos usar para mantener su atención? _____

--- ¿Cuál es la mejor manera de ayudar a su niño(a) a recuperar el enfoque? _____

¿Es su niño(a) hiperactivo? ☐ SÍ ☐ A VECES ☐ NO

¿Tiene comportamientos agresivos? ☐ SÍ ☐ NO

Si es SÍ por favor, explique.

¿Tiene su niño a agitarse fácilmente o a frustrarse emocionalmente? ☐ SÍ ☐ NO

--- Si es sí, ¿qué tipo de eventos pueden desencadenar este comportamiento? _____

--- ¿Cómo podemos saber si su hijo(a) empieza a ponerse agitado o emocionalmente alterado?

--- ¿Qué podemos hacer para ayudarle a él / ella para que se calme o para aliviar la ansiedad?

Problemas de Salud

¿Tiene su hijo(a) algún tipo de alergia? ☐ SÍ ☐ NO

Si es sí, explique:

Describa cualquier otra información o necesidades personales de interés. _____

Habilidades el baño

☐ Independiente

☐ Necesita un poco de ayuda... Explique _____

☐ Necesita de asistencia total

General

¿Qué te gustaría para tu hijo(a) durante este año de educación religiosa?

Describa cualquier preocupación o inquietud que usted tenga acerca de este año de educación religiosa.

Haga una lista de las habilidades o dones que usted cree que su hijo(a) tiene. _____

En qué área cree usted que su hijo(a) necesita más ayuda? _____

¿Qué es lo que su hijo(a) disfruta más? _____

¿Qué es lo que su hijo(a) no disfruta? _____

¿Cuáles son algunas de las estrategias que tienen éxito al trabajar con su hijo(a) (incluyendo las mejores maneras de enseñarle algo nuevo)? _____

¿Qué estrategias no funcionan? _____

¿Hay alguna información adicional que le gustaría compartir (incluya todas las cuestiones sensoriales o comportamientos de auto estimulación)? _____

Gracias por su tiempo para llenar este formulario.

This information is CONFIDENTIAL

**Sample Religious Education
Special Needs Placement Form**

Catechist: _____ Class: _____

This placement form is designed to inform you that a special needs learner is being placed in your Religious Education class. The following information will help you in teaching this student.

Child: _____

Parent: _____ Phone: _____

Disability: _____

This student has difficulty _____

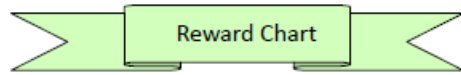
This student's strengths are:

Suggested adaptations/strategies: _____

Keep this form for your reference. At the end of the year, please return it to the RE office with the rest of your materials. If you used any activities or strategies that worked well for this student, please write them on the back of the form as to help next year's teacher.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me. God bless you and your students this year.

SAMPLE REWARD CHART



_____ marks = reward



_____ marks = reward

<u>Rules</u>	
1 -	
2 -	
3 -	

<u>Rules</u>	
1 -	
2 -	
3 -	