

Top 3 ways to connect with kids with varying abilities:

Introduction

When you're ministering with kids with varying abilities, you need to get to know some things about them in order for everything to run smoothly. Some may need a buddy to assist them with certain activities, some may need supports in social situations, and some may have dietary concerns you need to know about. All kids of all abilities need to know that God made them on purpose for a purpose, and that you love them with His heart. Here are 3 ways you can try to connect with kids whose strengths and struggles may be different than others.

#1

A Check-in Circle

Goals:

1. To quickly discover how everyone present is feeling and what they are bringing to the discussion or event.
2. To allow *every* child the share their voice in this group.

Materials: Space to have everyone in a circle, sitting or standing. A "talking piece" is very helpful. It might be a wand, stress-ball or other small object. A ball made for classes and ministries like this with built-in microphone called a Qball would be a great way to make sure all kids' voices are heard!

Instructions:

1. Gather in a circle. Every child and every leader/volunteer is in it.
2. Leader, prompt the circle-discussion with a SIMPLE question that kids can give a one-word answer to, for the first round. Some questions may need the explanation that a 2nd round will be for more details.
 - a. Example questions: "What color are you today?" or "On a scale of 0-3, where 0 is want-to-crawl-back-in-bed and 3 is so-excited-you-can't-sit-still, what number are you feeling right now?"

(this is a great one that can be done in silence by holding up a number using fingers!)

3. After that initial round (or 2), ask another question to focus more on the topic you want to discuss or the event you're here for, such as "Who is your favorite character in the story of the Exodus and why?"

NOTES:

- 🗨️ As the leader, it's often helpful to NOT give your response first, so that kids won't just copy your response. Toss the talking piece to a kid to start things off, and go around the circle in order with you in the mix of it.
- 🗨️ If a child does not have an answer to give, you can allow for them to say "pass" or you can say "we'll come back to you after everyone else has responded."
- 🗨️ A fun way for kids to say "me too" or "I agree" silently as others talk is to give the "hang loose" signal: make the letter Y in ASL, and twist your wrist back and forth.



#2

Puzzle-Piece Activity

Goals: To get to know kids' strengths and struggles and see how we all fit together. Kids can find others with the same gifts, or struggles, and may even discover how they can serve one another to support each other.

Materials:

- 🔗 A template/example from page 1 of this PDF you can use:
allbelong.org/media/Appendix-A_puzzle-piece.pdf -OR, you can order blank puzzle pieces from places like Oriental Trading Company or make your own.
- 🔗 Pencils, crayons, markers, etc. AND/OR, pre-print labels with phrases that kids might identify with as either their strengths or weaknesses:
 - Paying attention
 - Sports/athletics, physical strength
 - Technology
 - Music, singing, instruments
 - Art
 - Facts/information/trivia
 - Encouraging others
 - Etc.

Instructions:

1. Think about every child as an important part of your community who has gifts and strengths that your community needs, as well as areas of struggle you may need to support. Let everyone there know that they

are a piece of the puzzle in your community. Today you will all create a visual showing how the puzzle comes together.

2. Pass out blank puzzle pieces and any supplies needed (pencils, markers, etc. or pre-printed labels). Explain that the green side of the puzzle piece is where the areas of gifting and strength can be listed, and the pink side is where those areas of struggle can be listed. Leaders demonstrate your pieces, sharing your “greens” and a few “pinks”.
3. Everyone creates their puzzle piece.
4. Everyone share at least one “green” and one “pink” (which can be done in pairs, small groups, or as a whole group depending on the size of your group and what works best for kids to feel safe expressing these).
5. Put the puzzle pieces together on a wall, board or table where they can remain (or take a picture of them), showing how the community is made up of each piece. Just like I Corinthians 12:18 says – “God has arranged the parts of the body just as he wanted them to be”!

#3

Wordless Engagement

Goals:

1. Engage children who may not use words.
2. Offer visual options for all children in your ministry.

Materials:

- 🔍 Ribbons of various colors, tied to a wooden hoop, shower ring, hair tie or loop of elastic.
- 🔍 Pictures to represent activities in your session (such as the sample visual schedule available through allbelong.org/informational/church-resource-downloads-form/)

Instructions:

- 🔍 Praise Streamers:
 1. Make, or have children make their own praise streamers using ribbons of various colors. Tie the ribbons onto a wooden hoop, shower ring, hair tie or loop of elastic (with beads on it, if desired).
 2. Inform everyone to use these to show their praise for God by waving them as a sign of worship. (Keep them in a safe place so they do not become toys or accessories, bring them out for worship time).
 3. Use these praise streamers as a sign of visual praise during worship time (words NOT needed in order to praise God!).
- 🔍 Visual Schedules:

1. Create a visual schedule by printing off images, using Velcro or magnets to put them on a surface, or drawing your own on a white board or chalk board. You could even project the images on a screen. Some kids will do best having their own personal schedule, on a device or in a pocket-folder.
2. As you go through the activities you have planned, move a pointer/marker or otherwise highlight the icon/image you have made for that activity. If using a pocket-folder schedule, you or the child can remove the image/icon for that activity, and tuck it into the pocket. When all are put away, the session is over.

NOTES:

- 🔍 Some children do well having the empowerment of being the one to move the marker from one activity to the next. Some need the images to disappear once the activity is complete.
- 🔍 Some children do well with icons to represent activities. Some do better with real pictures of the activity.
- 🔍 Having images paired with words allows children of varying abilities and levels of understanding of your language to participate and understand more fully than words alone.
- 🔍 All Belong has full instructions and materials to create a visual schedule, praise streamers and other ways to engage with kids wordlessly in the Inclusive Worship Kit, available at allbelong.org/shop.