

Individual Spiritual Goals

In the interest of promoting spiritual growth for all persons, some churches have developed Individualized Spiritual Plans similar to the Individualized Education Plans used in public education. Reports of success have been mixed. Some parents found this process too much like school and simply wanted their children to be cared for and offered spiritual nourishment in the form of unconditional love. Others were glad to have specific goals for their children.

Whether the plan is formalized on paper in a meeting between parents and teachers or whether it is an informal agreement, it may be helpful for all to agree on what the goals are for a child's participation in Sunday School, Worship, or beyond Sunday activities.

Some Sunday School teachers have asked "What is Johnny or Susie getting out of this?" There are many answers. A child may be able to understand the stories or information being presented at a simpler level, or she may simply enjoy the love and acceptance she receives in the classroom. Other children may be able to participate in parts of the class where their particular gifts shine. For example, some children with autism find memorization easy. This provides them an opportunity to share their gifts as they recite the Bible verse of the day. It is important that teachers and parents work together to decide what is the best outcome for a child's participation in special needs ministries. Letting teachers know that this child's goals are important even if they are different from others in the class will help them welcome and appreciate the child's presence.

Goals for individuals in Special Needs Ministries might include

- Memorize and recite with classmates each weekly Bible verse. (Giving the verse ahead of time may help.)
- Participate in class activity with peers with help of a buddy.
- Participate in 20 minutes of large group worship.
- Recognize Christian symbols.
- Get creative...think of your own!

What is important is that the goals for each child be what is best for that child.

Age Appropriateness

As you choose curriculum and plan your programs, it is very important that the activities are age appropriate. Adults and Teenagers should not be playing preschool games. It is better to modify age appropriate games than to offer something that is too childish.

One Respite/Recreation program for teenagers offers the following ideas for age appropriate activities:

1. Karaoke
2. Video Games with E ratings
3. *Dance, Dance Revolution* video game
4. Making Bible Covers
5. Carving Pumpkins
6. Making Homecoming Mums
7. Card Games
8. Baking/Cooking

Parents may request that their child be included with younger children. That is fine as long as everyone (teachers, parents, and program coordinators) is in agreement. Some churches have handled this by having the older child be a "teacher's helper" in the younger class. Be aware of the physical dangers involved when larger children are placed in classes with smaller children.

Staffing

The paid staffing for your ministry will depend on the needs and numbers of the persons served.

Some Sunday Morning programs have paid positions for:

1. Special Needs Sunday School Teacher
2. Buddies to assist in classrooms.

Most Respite Care programs have one or more paid staff members who have medical or special needs training.

One Respite Care program has three paid staff members:

1. *RN:*
2. *Program Coordinator:* Contacts family applicants, assesses the need for respite care, review volunteer's strengths, interest and skills, assigns volunteers to each child attending program, keeps records current, shepherds families as needed. There are approximately 50 children and 60 volunteers who attend each session.
3. *Activity Coordinator:* Plans all activity and entertainment for each session.

Facilities and Equipment

The Ideal would be to have separate rooms for the Medically Fragile and the A & M's (Active and Mobile clients).

A. Medically Fragile Room

1. Supply closet stocked with diapers, wipes, cleaners, gloves, feeding tube attachments, nutritional supplements (liquid)- you can check with parents about brands.
2. Changing Table- large enough and sturdy enough for adolescents.
3. Bean Bags, Mats, Net Swings
4. High Cabinets with doors- *make sure all cabinets are attached to the walls!*
5. Minimize distractions on walls; use soft blue paint- has a calming effect.
6. NO shoes or use foot covers to protect children on the floor.
7. Large access bathroom per ADA specs
8. Parent Communication System / Safety Card System (paggers...)

B. A & M's (Active & Mobiles) Room(s)

We suggest these students are ministered to separately from the Medically Fragile so there is no chance for accidental injury to the more sedentary Medically Fragile client.

1. Secure Door- double door system is possible; *to provide safety for RUNNERS!*
2. Kinesthetic Activities- puzzles, K'nex, Legos
3. Visual Activities- computer games, videos
4. Blue painted walls- minimal visual stimulation on walls
5. Soft Music (instrumental, no vocals) playing in background
6. Cabinets attached to the walls (so they cannot be pulled or knocked over)
7. Washable Markers; Safety Scissors
8. Bathroom Issues- Make sure a key is available for outside access! Check with parents about self vs. supervised toileting.
9. Kid Safe- high or capped outlets; chemicals out of reach; supervise water play carefully
10. Hammock swing; Bean table/bucket; heavy blankets; crawl tube; places to get in or under (big boxes, sturdy table, toy box); ball pit; mini trampoline; Sit-n-Spin; Bean Bags; Giant Pillows/Couch Cushions.
11. Train Staff in:
 - Basic safety restraint holds;
 - Safe removal of dangerous objects from a child's hand;
 - Pulled hair release;
 - Bite prevention/release;

Information provided by Texas Special Kids
txspecialkids.org

