

VBS for Participants with Differing Abilities

Director Tips and Checklist



All children and volunteers are welcome! Regardless of limitations or abilities, all VBS participants need to experience the love of Jesus through caring adults. God created each of us with a variety of abilities that leaders need to take into consideration (and celebrate!) when planning VBS.

Besides more obvious opportunities to accommodate physical and communication needs, you may have VBS participants who need extra structure, require adaptations in their physical environment, or just have a more challenging time relating to others. A few simple steps and modifications can make all the difference in helping VBS participants with differing abilities to feel included, experience God's love, and grow in their discipleship.

A Checklist for Directors

- Inform families that you welcome anyone with differing abilities and disabilities. Families often feel that churches are not comfortable with or prepared for their child's challenges.
- Meet with each participant's parents or caregivers. They can provide valuable insights and suggestions concerning the specific needs for their child. Ask about:
 - the family's experiences in church
 - the child's interests and favorite activities
 - the child's daily routine, allergies, medications, and any physical accommodations or special equipment requirements
 - how the child best relates to others
 - preferred coping/discipline strategies
- Contact a special education teacher to help you understand a particular disability and for additional suggestions.
- Communicate expectations on supporting VBS participants with differing abilities to Station Leaders.
- Arrange for a Safe Sanctuaries-appropriate "buddy" to help with the activities or to provide gentle reminders on behavior. Be sure to equip him/her with a copy of the VBS Buddy Guide in advance, available in the Free Resources section of CokesburyVBS.com.
- Be alert for VBS participants whose parents have not informed you about their child's disability or specific needs. Have a volunteer ready to step in and help the child or teacher as needed.
- Provide a copy of the handout on the next page for each of your team members to prepare them for inclusion of VBS participants with differing abilities.

VBS Participants with Differing Abilities

Tips and Helps for Volunteers

All are welcome at our VBS and need to experience the love of Jesus through caring leaders and adults. Help us provide that by following these tips to help and include our friends with differing abilities:

Notes for All Leaders

- Remember that VBS participants with disabilities have God-given gifts to share with us all!
- Generate an atmosphere of love and respect, and present a positive attitude toward all people.
- Use multiple teaching methods provided in each session to engage all of the senses.
- Overlook harmless behaviors. Stay calm when you face a behavior you don't understand, and consult your Director if you need help.
- Keep directions simple by giving one at a time.
- Announce a five-minute warning before the end of all activities to facilitate smooth transitions.

Craft Leaders

- Allow extra time for VBS participants with differing abilities to complete their projects. Have an extra project on hand for VBS participants who finish quickly. Easy options are available in our **Reproducible Fun Pages!**
- Provide additional assistance with cutting, and other tasks as needed for each craft.
- Foster independence by allowing VBS participants with differing abilities to complete as many tasks as possible on their own.
- Prepare a volunteer to provide one-on-one guidance when needed.
- For VBS participants with visual impairments, have craft materials with a variety of textures available.

Recreation Leaders

- Review your games to determine if adaptations need to be made.
- Ask questions to make sure your VBS participants with differing abilities understand how to play each game. Give plenty of reminders of the instructions and rules throughout play.
- Pair or group all VBS participants and encourage them to interact and work together as they play.

Music Leaders

- Provide copies of the **Student Take-Home CD** to VBS participants to help them learn the songs at home.
- Teach each song's sign language and motions as you go to keep everyone engaged.
- Use the PowerPoint® slides from the **Complete Music CD** during all music times. When needed, provide words of the song in large print or Braille.

Science Leaders

- Display a visual, step-by-step guide illustrating the procedure for each experiment.
- Allow VBS participants with differing abilities to work at their own pace.
- Encourage other VBS participants to help as needed.
- Announce a five-minute warning before the end of an activity to facilitate smooth transitions.

Snack Leaders

- Keep extra snack supplies on hand in case of spills or other accidents.
- Ask your Director if any VBS participants have food allergies, sensitivities, or other dietary restrictions.
- Have snack alternatives on hand.
- Be sure to read lists of ingredients carefully; food substances that cause reactions can be present in common foods.
- VBS participants with food allergies often feel left out or treated as an "inconvenience" during snack times. Being attentive to all VBS participants' dietary needs shows them that they are valued. To VBS participants with a gluten intolerance, a cookie they can eat is not just a fun snack, but tangible evidence that they are known, loved, and welcomed!