



## How to Start a Special Education Ministry

Written by LifeWay.com Staff

I received a phone call a few years ago that both challenged me and yet encouraged me as a pastor. The caller to our church was a mother of a severely mentally challenged, eight-year-old boy. Corrie was a member of another church in our city but was considering changing churches. The reason was an unfortunate confrontation that had occurred a few weeks prior. The boy, Kyle, was being cared for during Sunday School and worship services in the church's preschool department. However as his body physically grew and his strength overpowered that of the preschoolers in the room, the other parents began to raise concerns.

I wanted to help Corrie with this need. Our small church had not established any provisions for a mentally challenged boy, but our Sunday School leaders wanted to respond to the family. We decided to enlist a worker, provide the space, and welcome the family to attend.

I visited in the home to meet Corrie and her son. Kyle had a sweet smile, and he was interested in this newcomer to his house. He wore a protective helmet to protect his head from occasional bumps. He wore diapers, and he babbled and played with baby toys.

Though I was not certain how we would accomplish it, I felt that our church could provide some kind of ministry to this little boy and his mother. (There were some brothers and sisters and a dad in the family, too.) So we completely cleared out a vacant Sunday School room and recruited a worker to stay with him in the bare room. It did look kind of bleak, but we didn't want Kyle to fall and hurt himself on any furnishings. The worker sort of played with the boy but wasn't sure how to teach him.

Kyle and his mom attended a Sunday or two. But then they discovered a different church that had an established special education ministry. They started attending there. I can't say that I blame them. We tried, but we really didn't know what to do.

If I had it to do over again, I would do some things differently. I would furnish the room with appropriate learning aids. I would call in some experienced people to get the worker(s) trained and see that the room is properly equipped for a special education ministry.

Many churches would like to provide this kind of ministry. Families in every community will respond to a church that establishes a special education ministry. These families with special needs children, youth, and

adults in the household appreciate a church that goes out of their way to set up appropriate learning environments for their special family members.

If the decision is made to establish a special education department, what is required to equip a room and provide workers for this kind of ministry? Here are some suggestions to help you get started.

### **Space and Equipment**

The room for a special education ministry should be as near to an entrance of the building as possible. Avoid rooms that are accessible only by going up or down stairways. Wheelchair accessibility is a must. Rest rooms that are handicap accessible should be nearby. Provide as large a room as possible for the department or class. The ideal room would have about 25 square feet per person for 80 percent of the anticipated enrollment.

### **Materials**

LifeWay.com features a [Special-Needs Ministry Section](#) where you will find an assortment of information to help in your ministry to these families.

Guitars, rhythm instruments, and electronic equipment such as cassette/CD players are helpful for enhancing the learning environment. Felt-tip markers, tear sheets, white boards, art supplies, and a cassette tape player are items that will be used in addition to the Sunday School curriculum materials.

Special Education Sunday School. Whether you have adults, youth, or children in the department, you will need caring people who understand the limitations and possibilities of their students. For safety and security, always enlist two or more people for each classroom. This protects both workers and students.

### **Training**

You will also want to provide training for workers in the special education department. Contact your associational Sunday School director or your state Sunday School department to inquire about training opportunities. At Glorieta and Ridgecrest Conference Centers training sessions are held during Sunday School Weeks in the summertime.

What about it? Will you look over your situation and decide to minister to special needs families? I hope you will. Supplies for Special Education Ministry - a Checklist

- Special Education Bible Study curriculum materials
- Special Education Today magazine (for workers and families)
- poster board
- newsprint
- construction paper
- felt-tip markers
- tempera paints
- colored chalk
- pens and pencils (include pencil grips)
- air-drying modeling clay

- paper towels
- dowel sticks
- scissors (adaptive scissors are available)
- tape
- glue sticks (avoid glue bottles)
- musical instruments
- a cassette/cd player