

A Primer on Interacting with Families Impacted by Disability

Imagine's Mission: To accept, love and care for families impacted by special needs and disability through exemplifying Jesus' love, mercy and compassion while supporting them to grow deeply, thrive emotionally and be in authentic community with one another. (1 John 3:18)

Primer Q & A

Question:

What happens when a first time visiting family notifies you that their child has a special need or disability?

Answer:

Inform them that Northview has a special needs supportive care program called Imagine. Direct them to the Kid Check Info Desk located in the pre-school area behind the Atrium. CM staffers have full information on the Imagine program and can provide families with all the details.

Question:

What should a greeter/host do or say if they observe or sense that a family has a child with a special need or disability but the parents do not say anything?

Answer:

Some parents, especially those new to a church community are quite sensitive about their child having a special need. Do not press the issue of supportive care with them. Instead, if you sense that their child may be in need of special needs support, discreetly hand them the Imagine brochure along with the Northview Kids brochure. This way, you have "covered all your bases" as it regards all the program options in Kids Ministry. Hopefully, the next time they visit, they will be more open to sharing about their child's supportive care need once they read what Imagine has to offer.

Question:

Should a greeter let parents suggest an age group in which they would like to see their child with special needs attend?

Answer:

If parents try to suggest where they would like to place their child with special needs, it is best if the greeter encourages the parents to head to the Kids Check Info Desk where they can chat with CM staff about the specifics of their child's placement. It is best that the parents first do a proper intake assessment with Imagine before placing their child within a particular environment. As some children need 1:1 support while others function better in a group environment, it is best to assess this need before having a new child attend any programming.

Primer Do's and Don'ts

Phrasing and terminology related to special needs supportive care can be a very sensitive issue when talking to parents. Here are some general pointers for interacting with families impacted by disability:

- Be mindful of your tone of voice. A family affected by special needs will likely pick up on your approach. Instead, just interact with them naturally as you would a typical family.
- When talking with a family or introducing them to other people, take the parents' lead in using the same terminology they use to describe their child with special needs.
- Always use first-person language. For example, say "child with Down Syndrome" or "child with autism" or "child with special needs." Do not say "Down syndrome child" or "autistic child" or "special needs child."
- In the same way, do not refer to a family as a "special needs family." Refer to them as a family impacted by disability or special needs. If contacting myself or Carrie or Adrianna at the Kids Info Desk, do not say, "I have a special needs family here." Simply say, "I have a family I would like you to meet."
- If a family has other children in addition to a child with a supportive care need, you can use the following terminology:
 - "typical child" refers to a child without a special need.
 - "typical programming" refers to classes for kids without a special need
 - "supportive care programming" refers to classes in Imagine.
 - "integrated programming" refers to a child with a special need attending a typical class
 - "specialized programming" refers to a child with a special need attending Imagine
- When speaking to a child, teen or any other individual with a disability, talk to them directly as you would a typical individual: e.g. If asking a child what their name is, ask them directly rather than asking their parents. Even if the individual cannot communicate with you, this shows them simple courtesy and respect.
- When talking to an individual in a wheelchair, crouch down so that you are at eye level with them. In maintaining eye contact, this shows them courtesy and that you are being respectful of the limitations of their disability.

*Imagine's motto:
"Supporting individuals lovingly created by God"
1 John 3:18*



