

Ministering to Children with Special Needs

And of some have compassion, making a difference: Jude 22

How are we meeting the needs of those with learning disabilities? When we don't know what to do, these individuals often get neglected. Compassionate people go out of their way to love others while showing concern for their suffering.

- We were designed by the Creator.
 - So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. Genesis 1:27
 - I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. Mark 10:13-16
- Jesus ministered to those with disabilities.
 - He healed a blind man, a deaf man, a mute man, a crippled man, and a demon possessed man.
- We tend to want to make those with disabilities fit into our world, our lifestyle, our way of doing things; but what we should be doing is making adjustments to help accommodate the needs of those with disabilities.
 - Hearing devices for the hearing impaired
 - Large print materials for the visually impaired
 - Wheelchair ramps for the physically impaired

Common Types of Special Needs

- Hearing Impairment
- Visual Impairment
- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Down Syndrome
- ADHD
- Behavior Disorders

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

- U.S. Statistics - Center for Disease Control/Autism Speaks
 - About 1 in 36 children has been identified with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).
 - ASD is nearly 4 times more common among boys than among girls.
- Autism Spectrum Disorder - a neurological and developmental disorder that affects how people interact with others, communicate, learn, and behave; there is a wide variation in the type and severity of symptoms.
 - Weaknesses
 - Difficulty with communication and interaction with other people
 - Restricted interests and repetitive behaviors
 - Symptoms that hurt the person's ability to function properly in school, work, and other areas of life
 - Strengths
 - Strong visual and auditory learners
 - Being able to learn things in detail
 - Being able to remember information for long periods of time
 - Excellence in a particular area such as math, science, music, art, etc.

- Teaching Strategies
 - Be calm and positive.
 - Have clear rules for behavior.
 - Model appropriate behavior.
 - Stick to routines.
 - Reduce unnecessary environment stimuli (loud noises, bright lights, etc.).
 - Establish a routine (activities, individuals).
 - Use visuals for transitions.
 - Allow ample time for transitions.
 - Use concrete rather than figurative language (quiet as a mouse; quick like a bunny).
 - Encourage participation when appropriate.
 - Redirect when possible.
 - Ignore when possible.
 - Use positive reinforcement to call attention to what a child is doing right.
 - Avoid situations that trigger agitation.
 - Be patient.
 - Seek help when needed.
- Classroom Setup
 - Minimize clutter - too much furniture or wall decor, too many toys.
 - Minimize sensory stimuli - too bright, too noisy.
 - Clearly define off-limits areas.
 - Have a calm-down area - a quiet area with some calming items the child enjoys (never use this as a punishment).

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

- U.S. Statistics - Center for Disease Control
 - Between 2016-2019, 6 million children between the ages of 6-17 were diagnosed with ADHD at some time in their life.
 - Boys are more likely to be diagnosed with ADHD than girls.
- ADHD - a neurodevelopmental disorder that usually presents in one or more of the following ways:
 - ADHD, Predominantly Inattentive Presentation - significant, persistent difficulties with regulating attention (do not exhibit problems with impulse control or hyperactivity)
 - A weakness in ability to focus and sustain attention and effort because tasks are repetitive, lengthy, not interesting or stimulating
 - Results in careless mistakes, not responding when spoken to, not following through on instructions, lack of organization skills, disliking or avoidance of tasks
 - ADHD, Predominantly Hyperactive-Impulsive Presentation - significant, persistent difficulties with impulse control and hyperactivity (do not demonstrate significant, persistent difficulties with attention regulation)
 - Failing to stop, think, and choose before doing something
 - Thinks about the consequences after the fact
 - Repeats the same mistakes over and over again
 - Can't wait their turn, interrupts, blurts out
 - Engaging in behavior that has nothing to do with the task at hand - wiggling, tapping, rocking, shifting, moving about the room, excessive talking
 - ADHD, Combined Presentation - significant, persistent difficulties with both attention regulation and impulse control/hyperactivity
- Problems that arise from ADHD

- Poor academic performance
- Aggressive conduct problems that can worsen during adolescence
- Poor peer relations
- Poor relationships with parents and teachers
- Low self-esteem - feel they can't do anything right
- Behavior Management Strategies
 - Establish and post classroom rules, giving frequent reminders of classroom rules.
 - Hands in your lap, sit up straight and NO talking!
 - Seat the child close to the teacher or another adult volunteer.
 - Allow for some restlessness.
 - Allow child to stand or use fidget as needed.
 - Give breaks when necessary - in or out of the classroom - with adult supervision.
 - Use participatory teaching - give child something to do to help you while you teach.
 - Intersperse low-appeal activities with high-appeal activities (song time, lesson time, game time, work time, etc.)
 - Be interesting.
 - Use non-verbal cues to redirect attention.
 - Personalize mild, private, direct reprimands (gentle touch on the arm with a brief, corrective statement).
 - Increase praise, approval, appreciation.
 - Reinforce positive behaviors by focusing more on what the child is doing well, rather than what he isn't doing well.
 - Communicate with parents when discipline is necessary.
 - Children with ADHD often end up continuing to do the same behaviors that get them in trouble over and over again because, even if they do stop long enough to remember they may be punished, they often cannot come up with an idea about what to do instead, so they end up repeating the very behavior that will get them punished again.

Role of the Teacher

- Ask God for wisdom and discretion.
- Communication with parents; consider making an in-home visit.
- Get to know the child's likes and dislikes.
- Understand the level of support that is needed.
- Recruit help.

Is your current level of compassion making a difference in the life of someone who is suffering?