

The Inclusion Volunteer

On your first Sunday as an Inclusion Volunteer a member of the Barnabas Team will introduce you to your student and their parents. A parent will go into the classroom with you and model for you how best to support their child. For most this will be one or two Sundays. The parents know their child best and will have valuable information that will help you to have a successful time with your student. The Barnabas Floor Monitor is someone who will be available to you throughout the morning for any questions or help you may need.

As you become acquainted with your student and his family, some questions you will want to cover:

1. What are your goals for your child in Sunday school?
2. How does your child communicate? Is it through good language skills, one or two words or phrases – what are those phrases? Or no words at all, but through body language?
3. How does your child process information and how can I help? Clarify? Simplify? Repeat?
4. How will I recognize that your child needs a break? What does that look like? What should we do? Where should we go? How will I know when it's okay to return to the classroom?
5. How do you motivate your child?
6. What kind of touch works with your child – hand on, hands off?
7. What are some pointers on transitions?
8. Are there escape issues? Any strategy?
9. What about bathroom needs?
10. Are there certain things that set your child off? What does that look like? What should be done?
11. What is the best way to comfort your child?
12. When should we call you?

Another thing that's really important is for you to understand the special needs family. It can be very different from your own experience. Be sure to download a copy of "Disability Impacts Families". Often Sundays can be the hardest day of the week for kids with special needs because

everything is different – different schedule, different building, many new faces – so getting to church can be a major accomplishment for the family. Your smile and willingness to take responsibility for their child so Mom and Dad can go in to the church service is a precious gift to them.

Some things that will help you get a fuller picture of what you will be doing in the classroom with your student:

- You need to understand that you are the key person making it possible for your student with special needs to participate in the regular Sunday school classroom. Your support can give your student the opportunity to hear the gospel, come to know Jesus and experience friendships with their peers in their class and in the church.
- Very practically, you are there to help the student participate, as they are able, in every part of the Sunday school hour. Learning to take turns and following the classroom rules are all a part of fitting in with their peers and being a part of the group.
- You will need to expect to be very 'hands-on' – sitting together during the story and moving together from activity to activity. You may need to hold a crayon in the child's hand or cut out pictures on a worksheet for them. You may need to help with the cup at snack time or encourage them to stay seated during the story. It may need to be that 'hands-on' for some of them. And note that this may change as you move through the year. Be prepared to give up some of your 'helps' as the student learns.
- You will have the opportunity to encourage peers to help your student participate – ex. pushing the wheelchair, sitting side by side at the table, working on a craft together. You will need to continue to offer guidance, but also need to be willing to step back a bit when peers want to help. That's really a nice thing when it happens. Safety issues may come into play so it takes discernment and a watchful eye. You may also begin to see your student participate in the routine of the classroom all on their own. That is huge. Be ready to step back and let that happen, too.
- You can be of help in the classroom if you feel you are able. Your child comes first, but you can learn a balance in what you are able to offer.
- You and the teacher can learn how to work smoothly together. As you both get to know your student, you will both sense what works and what doesn't with your student.

Some of the basics:

- Wear your Barnabas lanyard each Sunday. Others in the classroom need to know who is responsible for the special needs child in the room.
- Become familiar with your student's intake form.
- Arrive before the family comes with their child so you can connect with them. Finding out how the week or morning has gone can make a big difference in how things go in Sunday school.

- Staying until the child is picked up is a safety factor, but it also gives you the opportunity to report on your time together. If there is negative behavior, report this to the Floor Monitor and the two of you shall discuss this with the parent. See ["When a Volunteer Needs to Talk to a Parent"](#).
- Make sure that you exchange contact information with your family for planned and unplanned absences. Let you Floor Monitor also know.
- Make your service to your student a high priority. Parents and children all need you to be present.

Thank you for answering God's call on your life to support a special needs student in our Sunday school. You hold a key position in the spiritual formation in that child's life. Remember to pray for your student and his family throughout the week. Anticipate seeing God work in his life and enjoy your time together!