

Reflecting on Belonging

Are people with disabilities and their families...	What are we doing well right now in this area?	What could we do better or differently in this area?
Present		
Invited		
Welcomed		
Known		
Accepted		
Supported		
Cared for		
Befriended		
Needed		
Loved		

What next steps should we take to move us toward *belonging*?

Box 3.1

Interacting with People with Developmental Disabilities

The manner in which you interact with people communicates volumes about their worth and welcome. Too often, people are unsure of how to interact with a person with a developmental disability or their families and so they make no attempts to interact at all. The following general tips can help you feel more comfortable in welcoming and getting to know children and adults with developmental disabilities.

- Hospitality begins with a simple “hello.” A warm greeting and hearty handshake require no special training and should be dispensed generously.
- Many people are unsure of exactly what terminology to use when talking about people with disabilities. Refer to people as you wish them to refer to you—by name.
- Adults with developmental disabilities are first and foremost *adults*. Do not interact with them as you would with a child. Avoid being condescending in your speech or tone.
- Always look at and speak directly to a person with disabilities, rather than interacting through the family members, caregivers, or companion who is accompanying the person.
- Greet people with disabilities as you would anyone else, even if they are not able to communicate verbally or interact in typical ways. Do not assume that they cannot understand you.
- It may take some individuals with developmental disabilities extra time to say or do certain things. Patiently offer your attention.
- Grant every person the opportunity to do as much for themselves as possible. Ask a person if he or she would like assistance with a task, but wait until your offer is accepted before providing any help.
- If it seems that a person is having difficulty understanding you, try rephrasing your questions or comments in a different way. Similarly, if you are having trouble understanding someone, it is okay to ask him or her to repeat what was said.
- When in the presence of people with disabilities, do not talk about them as if they were not right there.
- Treat every person with respect, even when their participation looks a little different. Give bulletins, hymnals, prayer books, Bibles, and other materials to everyone, regardless of whether or not you believe they can read.
- When you observe a person engaging in behavior that is not appropriate, provide feedback that is clear, but nonjudgmental.

(Sources: Accessibilities Committee (1999); Bolduc (2001); & Cohen (2003)).

Source: Erik Carter (2007). *Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities: A Guide for Service Providers, Families, and Congregations*.

Who is Sam?

- Sam is 12 years old and in sixth grade; he has been attending our program for three years.
- Sam has three siblings: Meredith is 7, Wesley is 9, and Eric (his twin) also is 12.
- Sam's parents are Tim and Sandy.
- Sam has a genetic condition called Williams syndrome.

What does he like to do?

- He loves country music, race cars, and any kind of crafts.
- He enjoys drawing and is very good at doing portraits.
- Sam sometimes likes to rock back in forth. It keeps him calm.

How does Sam communicate with others?

- Sam is incredibly social and loves to talk with anyone he meets; he tends to interact more with adults, but he really wants to make new friends among his peers.
- When he is frustrated, he sometimes raises his voice or paces around the room.

What are some ways that you include him in activities?

- Sam has great difficulty reading, so ask him questions orally or pair him with a peer whenever reading is necessary.
- Find alternative ways to help him to participate, such as having him pass out worksheets and supplies, turn pages in the readings, or call on classmates during discussions.

What are some of the goals you can be helping Sam work toward?

- His parents are working with him on the importance of telling the truth and taking responsibility.
- Sam is noticing differences related to his disability. His parents would like us to find opportunities to reaffirm for Sam that God loves him very much.

How might you encourage Sam when he is doing something well?

- He loves adult attention and that is usually sufficient. An occasional "high-five" goes a long way.
- Sam loves going out for sub sandwiches after church; this can be used to encourage good behavior when he seems to be a bit agitated.

What should you keep an eye out for?

- Recently, Sam has had some behavioral challenges. They tend to occur when he feels rushed to finish something. Providing him cues that the class is almost over often helps.
- If he starts to pace, it is a sign he is about to lose his temper. Offer him a break to regroup.

Is it okay to talk about his disability?

- Sam's parents definitely want to increase understanding and acceptance among his peers, so it is okay to explain to other children about Williams syndrome to dispel any myths they may hold. Attached is a brief information sheet about his disability. Sam also is comfortable with answering questions from peers.

If you need any addition information, do not hesitate to ask Sharon Paulin (Room 108) or Sam's parents (555-1212).

Source: Erik Carter (2007). *Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities: A Guide for Service Providers, Families, and Congregations.*