



SAINT CATHERINE CENTER FOR *Special Needs*

Getting to Know the Individual with Special Needs:

A Guide for Catechists

All learners have different gifts and challenges. Disability, whether minor or significant, should not isolate someone from his/her peers or the worship community. Even if separate programming is appropriate, there are still ways to nurture connections.

If you don't have formal education or special education training, don't worry! An open heart, willingness to learn, and a sincere desire to share your faith go far in making individuals and families with disabilities feel welcome.

Guidelines for speaking with an individual with disabilities and/or his/her parents:

- Present an overall attitude of openness and a desire to be supportive.
- Let them know that in order to provide as positive an experience as possible, certain information is very important.
- The goal is to support a meaningful experience of inclusion and participation in your parish youth ministry and the full life of the Church.
- The questions are to help you learn the information, and use it as a guide to a conversation. Therefore, adjust the language as appropriate based on who you are talking with, the individual or the parents.

Topics for catechists to explore that help them get to know the individual, their needs and goals:

- What kind of experience do you want – what level of inclusion?
- What are your/his/her special interests?
- What are your/his/her special gifts?
- What are some of the challenges you have faced?
- What is your/your son/daughter's diagnosis?

- Does she/he have particular or potential interests in Mass or Catholic traditions? (for example, really enjoys music, ritual, singing, etc)
- How would you describe your/his/her social relationships or friendships?
- What methods of communication are used?
- What have been effective learning strategies?
- What are good motivators?
- Are there any challenging behaviors?
- What are possible triggers of challenging behavior?
- What are helpful responses to challenging behavior?
- What is helpful for holding his/her attention?
- Does s/he have any diet or environmental issues?
- Does s/he have any medical issues to be aware of?
- Do you have any other children? How do they relate to each other?
- Is there anything else you would like to share?