Special Needs in Adult Sabbath School

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Introduction

- Welcome
- At the conclusion of presentation, participants will be able to:
  - Explain intentional inclusion in the context of special needs ministry
  - Identify common categories of special needs
  - Name at least one accommodation to implement in their Sabbath School for a person with each category of special need
“I saw that it is in the providence of God that widows and orphans, the blind, the deaf, the lame, and persons afflicted in a variety of ways, have been placed in close Christian relationship to His church; it is to prove His people and develop their true character. Angels of God are watching to see how we treat these persons who need our sympathy, love, and disinterested benevolence. This is God’s test of our character. If we have the true religion of the Bible we shall feel that a debt of love, kindness, and interest is due to Christ in behalf of His brethren; and we can do no less than to show our gratitude for His immeasurable love to us while we were sinners unworthy of His grace, by having a deep interest and unselfish love for those who are our brethren and who are less fortunate than ourselves.”

Testimonies for the Church, vol. 3, p. 511
What is a special need?

• Generally, three criteria legally identify a person with a special need:
  • A special need is a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. Major life activities include breathing, communicating, hearing, learning, manual tasks, seeing, walking, or working.
  • A person with a special need has a record of such impairment.
  • A person with a special need is regarded as having an impairment that is limiting.
Focus of Special Needs Ministry

- Accessibility
- Education
- Encouragement
- Accommodation
Intentional Inclusion

• Inclusion
  • Condition that exists deep within a team or culture where differences are accepted, valued and respected.
  • Opposite of exclusion

• Intentional
  • Deliberate
  • Planned
  • Willful
  • Purposeful
  • Preconceived
Keep in mind...

... each person is a unique individual, with a unique set of circumstances, strengths, and needs.

We must be mindful of the cultural and personal factors that impact each person.
Intellectual Disability

- Permanent condition that impacts the ability to learn and process information
- Wide range of abilities and strengths; severe sensory impairment may be present
- Challenges with adaptive, social-emotional, communication, and physical development may be present
- May have difficulty inferring information from social cues and body language
- Issues to consider
  - Repeated opportunities for learning
  - Routines may be helpful
  - Use multisensory approaches (such as visual and auditory)
  - Present concepts in a simple manner, yet deep enough to encourage a full understanding of the gospel
Intellectual Disability
Strategies to Consider

• Keep meeting space **consistent**

• Break directions, concepts, and lessons down into **smaller chunks** of information, with a review at conclusion of Sabbath School

• Consider **partner or buddy activities** if feasible or appropriate

• In addition to the standard Sabbath School quarterly, order or print some copies of the **Easy Reading version** of the quarterly (http://www.absg.adventist.org/Archives.htm).
Schedule/Routine Idea

- Create a schedule/routine
Intellectual Disability
Strategies to Consider

• Use aids to assist in memorization
  • Link to appropriate musical selections

• Focus on concrete concepts first

• Simplify directions

• Provide visual cues (project picture of person kneeling before prayer, for example)
Intellectual Disability Strategies to Consider

- Multi-sensory approaches (visual and auditory)
- Teach **vocabulary** in an intentional fashion
- Check for understanding frequently
- Be patient
- Use individual’s **strengths** to foster meaningful participation in Sabbath School
Deafness/Hard of Hearing

- Described as one of the most unreached populations (estimated that only 2-4% are Christian)
- The individual may be deaf, or have a hearing impairment of varying severity; could affect one or both ears
- Individual may use sign language to communicate
- Expect average or above cognition
Deafness/Hard of Hearing

- Many people with a significant hearing impairment/deafness now have a cochlear implant
Deafness/Hard of Hearing Strategies to Consider

- Preferential seating
- Use of FM system
- Visual supports may be helpful
- Use visual images of program components
- Rely on multisensory input (use of a screen presentation)
- Introduce the Deaf and the hearing to the General Conference Deaf and Hearing website where networking and multiple resources can be found. (www.adventistdeaf.org)
Hidden Disabilities

- Metabolic issues, such as Diabetes
- Seizure Disorders
- Autism Spectrum Disorders
- Asperger Syndrome
- Learning Disabilities

- Individual responses vary greatly (impact on day-to-day life, support network, severity, culture unique personality)
Hidden Disabilities

Strategies to Consider

• Be aware of need for **sensory breaks** and consider how to provide those breaks; offer a **quiet room**

• Keep meeting space **consistent**

• Use **visuals** and written signage when possible

• **Inform** participants of the schedule/routine

• Break directions, concepts, and lessons down into **smaller chunks** of information, with a review at conclusion of Sabbath School
Hidden Disabilities
Strategies to Consider

- Use aids to assist in **memorization**
- Focus on the **concrete**
- **Simplify** directions
- **Model** social expectations and behavior
- **Multi-sensory** approaches
- In addition to the standard Sabbath School quarterly, order or print some copies of the **Easy Reading version** of the quarterly (http://www.absg.adventist.org/Archives.htm).
Jesus made clear that the Father is in heaven. It is important for us to remember this truth so that we can have the proper respect for God. We have a loving Father who cares deeply for the needs of His children. At the same time, we recognize that this caring Father is in heaven. This is where millions of angels worship Him because He is the only King of the universe, holy and powerful. The fact that He is our Father invites us to come to Him with the confidence (trust) of a child. But the truth that He is in heaven reminds us of His greatness, and we need to worship Him with proper respect.

Jesus made clear that the Father is “in heaven.” It is important to remember this truth in order to have the right attitude toward God. We have a loving Father who is concerned with the needs of His children. At the same time, we recognize that this caring Father is “in heaven,” where millions of angels worship Him because He is the only Sovereign of the universe, holy and omnipotent. The fact that He is our Father invites us to approach Him with the confidence of a child. On the other hand, the truth that He is in heaven reminds us of His transcendence and the need to worship Him with reverence.
Hidden Disabilities
Strategies to Consider

• Teach **vocabulary** in an intentional fashion

• **Check for understanding** frequently

• Be **patient** and go slowly when presenting information

• Use **strengths** to foster meaningful participation in Sabbath School

• Provide **visual cues** (project picture of person kneeling before prayer, for example)
Mobility/Motor Issues

- Many causes including:
  - Chronic (ex: Arthritis)
  - Trauma (ex: Traumatic Brain Injury, Stroke, Spinal Cord injury, Cerebral Palsy)
  - Infectious disease (ex: Polio, Meningitis)
  - Potentially degenerative process (ex: Multiple Sclerosis)
  - Congenital (ex: Dwarfism, limb differences)

- Assume average or better intellectual ability

- “How can I help?” is respectful and useful
Mobility/Motor Issues

- Safe accessibility often a major issue
  - Entrance
  - Within church and other buildings
  - Restrooms and drinking fountains
  - Seating for wheelchairs
  - Access to light switches
  - Lighting may deter or enhance access
Mobility/Motor Issues
Strategies to Consider

- Preferential **seating**—create a space; consider shorter pews in some rows
- Consider program **activities** (alternative to kneeling?)
- **Access** to restrooms
- Consider needs when **planning for participation** in programs (such as platform access)
Emotional Disabilities

- Conditions of the brain that can impact a person’s thinking, feeling, moods, behavior, and ability to interact with others

- Examples include:
  - Depression
  - Bipolar disorder
  - Schizophrenia
  - Anxiety Disorders
  - Social anxiety Disorders
  - Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
  - Phobias
  - Addiction
Emotional Disabilities

- Often stigmatized
- Very stressful for caregivers
- Great variability in manifestation day-to-day
- Likely a biological or biochemical issue
Emotional Disabilities
Strategies to Consider

• **Quiet room** available when/if needed

• Consider **small group** activity options

• Provide a warm and genuine **welcome**

• Try to create **pressure-free** situations

• **Don’t force** engagement with others

• If individual attends alone, consider identifying a **companion**
Communication Disorders

• Typically classified as:
  • Speech
  • Language
    • Expressive
    • Receptive

Oral and written language deficits may impact the ability to share thoughts, ideas, needs, and wants
Communication Disorders
Strategies to Consider

• Create multiple, repeated opportunities to master new information

• Present new information in a variety of formats

• Present key spiritual concepts in a manner simple enough to be understood and accepted, yet deep enough to impart a personally meaningful understanding of the gospel.

• Provide visual cues (project picture of person kneeling before prayer, for example)
Communication Disorders
Strategies to Consider

• When feasible/possible, use actual objects or other visual aids when teaching a concept

• Begin with more basic/simple concepts and build to the more complex/abstract

• Chunk information into smaller bits of information

• Review key concepts at conclusion of lesson

• Break directions into individual steps
Communication Disorders Strategies to Consider

• Use visual supports and repetition

• Audio tape the lesson and provide it to the individual before or after it is presented in Sabbath School.

• Explain vocabulary to enhance understanding

• Model patience to decrease frustration

• Include ways to highlight their strengths and abilities
Communication Disorders
Strategies to Consider

• If the individual uses a communication device, offer to receive training on how to utilize it to foster communication.
Blindness/Visual Impairment

- Range of visual challenge
- Worldwide estimates indicate that 285 million people worldwide have a visual impairment; 246 have a low vision issue, and 39 million are blind.
Blindness/Visual Impairment
General support strategies

- **Identify yourself and others** with you when you approach a person who cannot see you.
- Indicate when you are **concluding** your current contact with the visually impaired person and are moving away.
- Remember that individuals with visual impairment often rely on use of their arms/hands to help them maintain a sense of safety; because of this, it is best to **ask** what kind of assistance they would like.
Blindness/Visual Impairment Strategies to Consider

- Place **reflective tape** on stair edges
- Be cautious about **physical dangers** (ex: uneven or slippery flooring, sharp or protruding corners)
- Ensure adequate **lighting**
- Educate others about the person’s **service/guide dog**
- Have **magnifiers** available
Blindness/Visual Impairment
Strategies to Consider

- Produce **large font** bulletins/programs
- Announce the **name**, not just number, of hymns
- Order copies of the *Adult Large Print Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* at [http://www.absg.adventist.org/Archives.htm](http://www.absg.adventist.org/Archives.htm)
- Order **Braille quarterly** if appropriate from Christian Record Services for the Blind ([www.christianrecord.org](http://www.christianrecord.org)).
- Provide **audio recording** of lesson study
Reviewing our learning targets

• Explain intentional inclusion in the context of special needs ministry

• Deliberate, planned, and purposeful approach to ensure that each child, youth, and adult is accepted, valued and respected as we share the love of Christ with them.
Reviewing our learning targets

• Identify common categories of special needs
  • Intellectual disability
  • Deafness/Hard of Hearing
  • Hidden disabilities
  • Mobility/Motor issues
  • Emotional disabilities
  • Communication disorders
  • Visual Impaired/Blind
Reviewing our learning targets

• Name at least one accommodation you can implement in your Sabbath School for each category of special need

• Intellectual disability
• Deafness/Hard of Hearing
• Hidden disabilities
• Mobility/Motor issues
• Emotional disabilities
• Communication disorders
• Visual Impaired/Blind
Thank-you for joining us!

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