



Questions About Special Needs Students

All leaders struggle with children who push the limits of patience, tolerance, and endurance. Thomas C. Lovitt in *Introduction to Learning Disabilities* says that from two to thirty percent of the population may have a learning disability. Children with learning disabilities (LD) and behavior disorders (BD) present a challenge for leaders. A leader can rise to the challenge by:

- recognizing LD and BD characteristics;
- embracing effective attitudes;
- accomplishing successful actions; and
- creating an atmosphere conducive to learning.

The ultimate goal is salvation and discipleship of all, including LD and BD children.



How will I recognize children with special needs?



Abraham Ariel in *Education of Children and Adolescents With Learning Disabilities* identified several common traits: difficulty with attention and concentration, difficulty getting along with others, easily frustrated, impulsive in actions, continual restlessness, and poor self-concept.



What attitudes do effective leaders embrace?



LOVE—The love of Christ must permeate every word and action. The love of the Lord is a

leader's most powerful asset. Pray that the Lord will replace frustration and resentment with love and compassion. All people want to feel accepted and valued. Showing genuine concern fosters this feeling.

PATIENCE—Effective leaders demonstrate patience. When the Holy Spirit is prominent in our lives, He will produce the fruit of patience. Teachers must also be tenacious in perseverance. Just as Paul persevered through beatings, abandonment, exhaustion, and shipwreck, leaders must remain devoted.

INSIGHT—Finally, effective leaders look for potential. Jesus saw past the gruff, impulsive actions of a fisherman to find the character and value of an apostle—Peter. By embracing the attitudes of love, concern, patience, tenacity, and insight, leaders can be effective.



What actions do successful leaders accomplish?



They nurture strong leader-child relationships. In her book, *The Complete Learning Disabilities Handbook*, Joan M. Harwell states, "Research has shown that the single most important variable in learning is the leader-child relationship."

They invest quality time in crafting sessions. A well-prepared session will be enjoyed and remembered by children and bring satisfaction to leaders.

They foster a positive, warm, and inviting mood. A sincere compliment, warm smile, and loving hug will reap great rewards.

They establish rules. Rules should be clear and concise, and posted in at least two locations. They should be worded positively. "Only walking is allowed" is more positive than "No running." Use at most five rules. Broad rules are better, such as "Respect people and their property." Fair and consistent enforcement is critical!

They develop consistent routines for class time. Devise routines for situations like arrival, story time, asking questions, rest-room time, leaving the room, etc. Structure is a strong prevention of misbehavior!

They promote "time on-task." For children to stay focused, they must be given the correct materials, be placed in groups of four or less children, and get prompt attention if they have difficulties.

They develop strong teaching habits. Speak clearly and with enthusiasm. Involve children directly in the session. Minimize lecturing. Move among the children. Keep eye contact. Show respect to all. Model appropriate behavior. Clearly communicate positive expectations. Expect the best from all children.

They choose meaningful activities that should: be short and have limited instructions, keep the leader free to move among the children, allow all chil-

dren to be successful, and build a strong feeling of “belonging.” Provide alternative activities to accommodate a variety of abilities.

•**They pray for and minister to children outside of church.**

Finding creative ways to minister to children will make a profound impact on them and on their families.



How can I create an atmosphere of learning for LD and BD children?



➤ Maintain a “calm” environment, free from excessive activity, noise, etc.

➤ Place them in low “traffic”

areas of the room.

➤ Warn them ahead of time regarding changes of activity or routine.

➤ Seat them near the leader; a gentle, appropriate touch will often settle and refocus them.

➤ Avoid snacks that are high in sugar, artificial colors and flavors, caffeine, milk, and citrus.

➤ Surround them with calm and controlled children.

➤ Do only one activity at a time.

➤ Demonstrate patience and gentleness consistently.

➤ Give clear directions and have the children repeat them.

Children with special needs have a unique way of highlighting the weaknesses of leaders.

Rather than this being a threat, it should be a challenge to grow.

The Lord expects us to strive for excellence and He empowers us with the Holy Spirit.

There is great joy in seeing the growth of LD and BD children as we disciple and nurture them into “Christlikeness.” Keep in mind: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9); and “I can do everything through him who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:13).

Questions For Further Study—

1. List the three attitudes that effective leaders embrace, and name a way to demonstrate each in your classroom.
2. Of the nine actions of successful leaders listed in this article, name three in which you need the most improvement.
3. What actions will you take to improve your skills with LD and BD children?

This article originally appeared in *Young Explorers: Route 66*. Young Explorers is a grade-school children’s church program that utilizes environmental themes for a fun learning experience. For a complete theme chart and order form, call 1-800-641-4310.

