



Steps for a Healthy LifeKids Buddy Program

Tiered Special Needs Strategy

Whether beginning a new special needs initiative or overhauling an old one, here are some things to keep in mind as you cast vision, build up, and bring visibility to what you have to offer the community.

First Tier: Vision

- **Cast vision for your Buddy program to your staff.**
 - Why does having a healthy, visible LifeKids Buddy program matter?
 - Nearly 50% (46.6%) of special needs parents said they refrained from participating in a religious activity because their child was not included or welcomed.
 - Almost 1/3 (32.3%) of the special needs families who *did* try church said they had left at least one church because their child was not included or welcomed.
 - More than half of special needs parents reported that they had kept their child from participating in a religious activity because support was not provided (55.8%) or they had been expected to stay with their child at a religious activity so their child could participate (55.3%).
 - Sources for all stats above included in [this article](https://church4everychild.org/2016/02/09/what-are-the-stats-on-disability-and-church/):
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 - What's the plan to reach these families?
 - We are going to have consistent support to provide a caring environment for every child in our communities.
 - Inconsistency and invisibility to families outside of our church who need extra care ends now. We refuse to have zero visibility of our inclusion programming.
- **Walk staff through the game plan.**
 - Familiarize staff with all training documents and forms.
 - **For Staff**
 - Read First: LifeKids Buddies Documents Overview Table of Contents
 - Building Up LifeKids Buddies: Strategies for Recruitment, Onboarding, and Training
 - LifeKidsBuddies: How They Support Special Kids and Their Families
 - Partnering with Special Parents: Ideas to Help Communicate and Support with Wisdom and Tact
 - **For LifeKids Buddies**
 - Tips for Using Sensory Toys and Comfort Items
 - LifeKids Buddies Video: Tips for Using Sensory Toys and Comfort Items

- Be the Best Buddy You Can Be Training for LifeKids Buddies
- **For All Volunteers**
 - Special LifeKids and Their Buddies Sensitivity Training for all LifeKids Leaders
- **Forms**
 - LifeKids Buddy Agreement Form
 - Fun Facts and Helpful Hints Parent Form (*Print Double Sided*)
 - Parent Release Form
- Address questions.
- Begin rollout/revitalization.
- **Put together/refresh a bin of sensory toys to be ready for the second tier.**

Second Tier: Recruitment and Training

- **Be available and support your staff and Buddies through the process.**
- **Cast vision to all LifeKids Leaders.**
 - Offer all existing LifeKids Leaders access to **Special LifeKids and Their Buddies Sensitivity Training for All LifeKids Leaders.**
- **Recruit Buddies.**
 - **Need one Buddy at every experience** (implement asap) 1 floating Buddy at each service + one-on-one Buddies for each kid who needs one. (*Use **Building Up LifeKids Buddies: Strategies for Recruitment, Onboarding, and Training** staff training for recruitment ideas.*)
- **Onboard and train Buddies.**
 - Explain and have Buddies fill out the **Buddy Agreement Form.**
 - Explain and walk Buddies through the LifeKids Buddy training documents.
 - **Tips for Using Sensory Toys and Comfort Items**
 - **LifeKids Buddies Video: Tips for Using Sensory Toys and Comfort Items**
 - **Be the Best Buddy You Can Be Training for LifeKids Buddies**
 - Put together a closed Facebook group and add LifeKids Buddies and staff.
 - Think through how you will keep the group moderated and how you will keep it updated with fresh tips and victory stories to encourage Buddies and staff.
- **Start thinking about what to do to update blurbs on any documents your church uses that can bring visibility to your special needs program in the third tier.**
 - Websites
 - Bulletins
 - Ministry brochures
 - Posters
 - Slides
 - Potty pubs
 - Automated forms
 - Parent resources
 - New family letters
- **As an additional strategy, use the LifeKids Buddy recruitment promo video, “Athens’ Story.”**
 - See if you can run the video on the weekend and follow it up from stage.

- See **Building Up LifeKids Buddies Strategies for Recruitment Onboarding and Training** for ideas on what to say for the close.

Third Tier: Visibility

- **Check the health of your buddy program.**

- Questions to ask yourself and staff:
 - Do I have strategies in place to attend to the needs of any family with a child with special needs right away?
 - Is the experience of every family with special needs consistently excellent?
 - Do I have enough LifeKids Buddies in place to serve kids who need them?

If the health of your program is not good, revisit the first and second tiers to see what you can do to improve.

If the health of your program is good, move on to bring visibility:

- **Update blurbs on any documents your church uses that can bring visibility to your special needs program.**
- **Respond to any inquiry into the support you offer to kids with special needs within 24 hours.**
- **Celebrate!**