



Partnering with Special Parents

Ideas to Help Communicate and Support with Wisdom and Tact

Parents have a challenging job. Parenting a child with emotional, behavioral, cognitive, or developmental differences can be even more challenging. How can we partner with parents who are facing challenges we may not even understand? Here are some common questions and strategies to answer them.

How do I tell a parent I think their child needs a one-on-one Buddy?

- You may not have to. Try these strategies first:
 - Check to see if an in-room leader is overreacting to a strong-willed child.
 - Check the room's ratios. Overly crowded rooms are under-supported. Adding the right number of leaders can eliminate a host of challenges.
 - Ask the parent—in a non-shaming way—for advice. They can share how they handle the challenging behavior you've observed in the room. They may have a strategy that works well for their child.
 - Use the experience's on-call Buddy for a few weeks to support a child. A consistent supporter can help a child learn the program and what's expected of them. Extra help for just a few weeks may be all a child needs to become acclimated to LifeKids.
- Sometimes, you do need to talk to parents about their child needing a Buddy.
 - If you've tried the above strategies without success, you may need to get the child a one-on-one Buddy for a longer time. Pray for wisdom, tact, and sensitivity, and try saying something like, *"I'm so glad to have your son in LifeKids! He's adorable and incredibly lovable. May I tell you about some behavior we've been observing? We're dealing with hitting and throwing. We're concerned he doesn't feel calm and regulated in our program. Our environment is fun and stimulating, but for some of our kiddos, it can feel overwhelming. We've tried several strategies to help him feel more secure, and we've found a little added support is working best for him. When one of our LifeKids Buddies works with him, he settles in, isn't becoming physical with the other kids or leaders anymore, and even watches some of the teaching video with the other kids! I'd love to offer your son a one-on-one Buddy for the next three months to help him become better adjusted to our programming. We can re-evaluate after that!"*

What do I do if a parent asks for a Buddy?

- Every child with a disability does *not* need a one-on-one Buddy. Cognitive delay does *not* automatically mean a child will need extra support in our programming.
- How can you tell if a child needs a one-on-one Buddy or if the on-call Buddy can monitor the child for a while? Here are a few strong indicators a child would benefit from a Buddy.
 - The child has demonstrated consistent flight risk, physically dangerous behavior, or consistently shows behaviors indicative of sensory overload like meltdowns.
 - The child has needs a one-on-one aide in school.
 - The child is not able to participate in mainstream education due to behavioral challenges.

What do I do when it's time to assign a Buddy to a child?

- Have the parent fill out the **Fun Facts and Helpful Hints** form.
- Explain the **Parent Release Form** to the parent and have them sign it if they're comfortable with it.
- Help the parent figure out which experience time is best for their family to attend.
 - Talk through how full each experience is, which times work best for the child's schedule and routine, and which experiences currently have an unopened room their Buddy could use for a quiet space as needed. *See the **Phrases to Avoid** list at the end of this document for help on how to say this tactfully.*
- Recruit a Buddy or two to work with the child and family at their chosen experience time.
 - When a pair of Buddies supports a child, they can work together for a while, especially with a child who may be more physical or prone to running off. As a child adjusts to LifeKids, the Buddy team can coordinate weekends if they're out, so the child will still have a familiar Buddy.
- Help the Buddy exchange contact information with the family you've assigned them to. The direct connection helps the family communicate with the Buddy if they're unable to make their regular service time. They can share new tips or strategies that have been helpful for the child, as well as offering the Buddy a way to further connect with and encourage the family they're serving.

Help me know what to say to a parent of a special LifeKid.

Imagine yourself overworked and under-slept. Then, imagine someone tells you your child is "acting up." Again. It can be irritating, shaming, and tie your stomach up in knots. That's far too often the life of parents who have kids with emotional, behavioral, cognitive, or developmental differences. Show them **our church is a place where every family is cared for and welcomed, regardless of how much care they need.**

Here are some phrases to avoid and some great phrases to try instead!

- **Don't:** We had to get a Buddy to help your daughter today.
 - **Do:** *We loved getting to know your daughter and spending time with her today. She responded well to the one-on-one support we were able to provide for her. One of our Buddies worked with her to help her transition from free play to movie time. She did great with that extra support!*
- **Don't:** I think your child has: a developmental issue, autism, special needs, ADHD, behavioral problems, etc.
 - **Do:** *How do you usually get your child to respond to you at home?*

- **Do:** *How do you usually handle (name behavior) at home?*
- **Don't:** *I don't know how you do it!*
 - **Do:** *You're a great parent. I sure do love your kiddo! We're so glad you're part of our church.*
- **Don't:** *We need you to come to a less attended experience. The best time for you is the 8:30.*
 - **Do:** *We usually have fewer kids at our 8:30am and 4:00pm experiences. We even have an empty room at those times. If you authorized one-on-one support, your son's Buddy can bring him to that empty room if he needs a calm place. Do those times work for you and your child's daily schedule?*
- **Don't:** *Your kid is too big for the other kids in their room. It's dangerous.*
 - **Do:** *We think your son is ready to move up! Don't worry, though. The curriculum in the room is the same as he's used to. But, we feel his motor skills and size are better suited for the kids in Cross Town instead of The Ark. We're excited about this change, and the teachers are excited to meet him! We'd love to try this change next week. What do you think?*
 - **Do:** *We think your son is ready to move up! His motor skills and size are better suited to Konnect instead of Cross Town. Konnect has kids from 1st to 4th grade, but the small groups are broken down by grade level, and we can have the support of a one-on-one Buddy for the first month or so to help with the transition. The small group leaders in Konnect are excited to have him. We'd love to try changing next week! What do you think?*
- **Don't:** *Your kid (ran out of the classroom, hurt someone, was flailing on the ground, etc.) so we restrained them until you picked them up.*
 - **Important:** *Laws and regulations surround restraining a child because it is potentially dangerous and even deadly to restrain a child improperly. **Do your research and reach out to your leadership and the child's parents to make a game plan.** See this website for more help: <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/seclusion/index.html>*
 - **Do:** *Your child seemed uncomfortable in class today even with the support of their Buddy. Sadly, they (ran out, hurt themselves, hurt someone else, had a meltdown, etc.). We couldn't help them to feel calm and safe again in their room, so we brought them to (name of safe place or LifeKids room) so they could have some quiet time. We know it might take time for them to get used to LifeKids, and we're honored to keep working with them until they are! Is there anything we can do differently next week to help them feel more comfortable here?*
 - **Do:** *What do you do at home to redirect or calm your child when they (bite, run off, demonstrate unsafe behavior, etc.)?*
 - **Do:** *Your child seemed uncomfortable in their LifeKids room today. Would you like to bring them in sometime during the week? We can turn on the lights and music so your child can get used to being in our environment at their own pace.*
- **Don't:** *We can't allow your child to participate in LifeKids anymore.*
 - **Do:** *It looks like your child still isn't comfortable here even with the Buddies we've tried. For some kids, our environment is just too stimulating. That's okay. We're committed to finding a solution for your family. Can we set up an appointment this week to talk through options?*
 - *Talk with your leadership to determine options.*