



Be the Best Buddy You Can Be!

Training for LifeKids Buddies

God wants all His kids to be able to understand how much He loves them, and you're helping to accomplish God's loving mission in the life of every child you work with when you're a LifeKids Buddy!

Here are common questions people ask when they're a LifeKids Buddy. Read through and find the answers!

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How can I partner with my special LifeKid's family?

What is a Buddy?

1. **A one-on-one Buddy provides one-on-one leadership and attention to any child who needs additional support.** Buddies consistently work with and get to know the child so the child will feel safe. The child will be safer, too, because there is an extra set of hands and eyes to monitor the child's needs. A one-on-one Buddy may support a child for several weeks, months, or years as needed.
2. **On-call Buddies work with the Coach.** *Every experience should have a floating Buddy on-call.* They can work with any new families who attend church with their special LifeKid. They work with the Coach to identify and work with kids who may need extra support. **Example:** Any child can have an "off" day, causing them to display challenging behavior that requires extra support. At the discretion of the Coach or LifeKids staff, the Buddy on-call can work in any room to offer support to a child so other leaders can better focus on the needs of their small groups. An on-call Buddy may step in and out of rooms as needed to help different kids.
3. **A Buddy partners with the whole family.** It's stressful for moms or dads who are constantly called away from the church experience to pick their child up from LifeKids due to challenging behaviors. A family with a Buddy can enjoy peace of mind while they're at church, because the Buddy works closely with them to learn what works at home, day care, or school, and helps apply those methods to offer a consistent, effective experience for the child.
4. **A Buddy is not always needed.** The goal of a Buddy is to provide one-on-one support for *only as long as it's needed*. A child may have a developmental breakthrough in LifeKids at any point. When they're able to stay in the room using the same supports as their peers, their Buddy can begin to work with a new family who needs them.
5. **LifeKids Buddies aren't meant to follow around every child with differences.** A parent dropped off a child and mentioned they have autism. Do they need a Buddy? Probably not. Buddies are an incredible blessing to kids who need them, but *they're not a catch-all, mandatory support system* to be called in simply because of a child's diagnosis. Many children with differences don't demonstrate challenging behaviors and will adjust to their new environment with the existing supports in the room.
6. **Buddies reinforce the curriculum to a kid at the kid's level.** A Buddy will figure out what their child is interested in and use that as their starting point for bringing Scripture and God's love into the child's world. Creative strategies include:
 - Learning ways to communicate with a child who is non-verbal
 - Singing to a kid who doesn't respond well to speech
 - Drawing a picture of Jesus and telling the child God loves them
 - Using a sensory toy to help a child calm and refocus

Am I qualified to be a Buddy?

Some Buddies have formal training for working with children who have special needs, but that's not required. You have what it takes to be a Buddy if you can honestly check off the box next to each of these qualities:

- I am patient with children.
- I can empathize with a child who demonstrates behaviors I don't understand.
- I can think on my feet.
- I can remain calm in potentially stressful situations.
- I can be tactful when speaking with parents.
- I am quick to forgive.
- I can remain present in the moment.
- I can help LifeKids leaders learn strategies to serve children who need extra support.

Can you tell me about the kids I might work with?

It's worth repeating: A child may have an identified difference or disability, but that does not always mean they need a Buddy. Buddies are assigned to any child who is dysregulated and demonstrating their emotional, cognitive, or sensory systems are overloaded for any reason. **For example:** A two-year-old might be dealing with a head cold one weekend. That child may require your assistance to be able to stay comfortable. This list will give you some examples of a few of the special needs many of our kids who have a Buddy display.

1. A child has an Autism Spectrum Disorder.

- This child may have difficulty with language. They may not be able to speak, and may not understand all the words they hear. A child with autism may have an enormous vocabulary, but may be unable to talk about anything outside of their special interest area (such as dinosaurs or trains).
- This child may not have age-appropriate social skills like sharing, turn-taking, waiting in line, etc. They may not understand that the adult in the room is also the authority in the room. They may have no interest in playing with other children (or you).
- This child may become easily overstimulated by their senses. They may seem to over-react to smells or become very upset if they touch something sticky. They may strongly dislike touch, even a gentle one. Or, they may crave deep pressure like a bear hug.
- They may engage in repetitive play, where they want to repeat an activity they like nearly endlessly. For example, they may like to flick a light switch on and off for hours or sit on the floor and rock back and forth.

2. A child has a vision impairment.

- This child may be blind, have low vision, or have a modified field of vision. They may need support to follow visually cued directions, to move around the room, to interact with other kids, or to follow along with videos.

3. A child has a hearing impairment.

- This child will have hearing loss. They may hear your words very faintly, or they may hear no sound at all. They may need support to follow aural directions, to interact with other kids, or to follow along with videos.

4. A child has a physical disability.

- This child may come to LifeKids in a wheelchair, have braces on their legs, or have other mobility or dexterity limitations. *Many kids with physical disabilities do well in our rooms without the extra support of a Buddy. Some may have other needs and will benefit from extra support.*

5. A child has a significant Attention Deficit Disorder and/or Hyperactivity Disorder.

- This child may not be able to focus or may become distracted very easily.
- This child may be hyperactive, have difficulty calming down after stimulating physical activity, or may be restless when transitioning from free-play to more structured group activities.
- This child may have trouble complying with requests and directions quickly. It may be difficult for them to switch focus from what they're doing to what you have asked them to do.

6. A child has Sensory Integration Disorder or a Sensory Processing Disorder.

- This child's senses work together in atypical or unexpected ways.
- They may have difficulty processing more than one sense at a time. For example, they may have to alternate between watching your face and listening to your words.
- They may dislike a gentle pat on the head, but love rough and tumble play (or vice versa).

7. A child has a seizure disorder.

- This child has a neurologic condition that may cause a brief disruption in the function of their body or mind. They may blink, fall asleep, convulse, need to be reoriented to time and place, have a change in mood, or have their behavior affected.
- They may need to wear a helmet to keep them safe in case of a fall.

8. A child has Down's Syndrome.

- The child will be behind their peers developmentally. They may have fewer words or be less coordinated than the other children in the class, or they may have trouble taking turns and interacting with peers in a socially appropriate way.
- About half of children with Down's Syndrome may also have a vision or hearing problem.

9. A child has a history of neglect or abuse.

- They may have severe trust issues.
- They may need extra support to feel safe and secure in their surroundings.
- They may respond to adult authority in their classroom in unexpected ways. For example, they may obey instructions given only by leaders of a specific gender or be overly timid or defiant around adults.

What will I do on the weekend with my special LifeKid?

You'll attend as much of the regular programming as possible. Here's what that may look like:

1. **If possible, connect with your child's family the night before.** They can let you know if they're planning on attending the next day and can give you a heads-up about the kind of week their child is having.
2. **Get information from the parent.** Be sure to look over the child's **Fun Facts and Helpful Hints** sheet. It is a great resource for communicating with the child and finding strategies that have worked for them in other environments. If your special LifeKid doesn't have a form available, ask your experience Coach or a LifeKids staff member about the best way to follow up and get one filled out.
3. **Work one-on-one within the child's classroom as needed.** Sit with your special LifeKid in a small group as long as you can support them enough to avoid disrupting the flow of the group. Include them in as much of the programming as possible. If your child is uncomfortable being near the other kids, you two can form your own small group! Color an Adventure Book, read through a Challenge Card, quietly sing songs together, or use sensory toys to keep your child calm until their parents return to check them out.
4. **Attend class as much as your special LifeKid can handle.** If your child needs a break, first note what the parents have authorized on the Parent Release Form. If you're able to work one-on-one, you might take the child for a walk if they become overwhelmed. *If needed, ask a coach to walk with you.* If you're authorized to work one-on-one in an empty LifeKids room, you may do so as needed with the lights on and the top half of the door open. Always work toward bringing the child back to the room and always continue to reinforce the weekly lesson with the child as much as possible.
5. **Use the sensory toys as needed.** Check with your Coach or LifeKids staff for sensory toys. Some toys are good for offering calming sensory feedback. Some are good for helping a child focus. Ask your Coach or a LifeKids staff member about the **Tips for Using Sensory Toys and Comfort Items** training for some helpful pointers.
6. **Get the weekly lesson into your child's heart.** If you need to take a walk with your special LifeKid, you can still talk about what they need to hear. **For example:** You can say in a sing-song voice, "God loves (child's name)!" Create a game of it. Say, "God loves ..." Stop, look for eye contact, put on a huge smile, and say, "(Child's name)!" when your child looks for you to say their name.
7. **Lead with praise.** Offer high fives, smiles, and words of praise to your special LifeKid as much as possible. When a parent comes to pick up their child, make sure the first words out of your mouth are positive. **For example:** Say something like, "We made it through 5 minutes longer of our movie this week!" even if you've had a particularly challenging day with your child. Find a positive thing to share.
8. **Help your special LifeKid stay safe.** The child you're working with may display some behaviors that aren't safe to themselves or others, such as biting, hitting, pushing, trying to escape the room, etc. Use the **Fun Facts and Helpful Hints** form if the child's parents have filled one out to find what helps motivate and calm the child. When you use the positive behavioral strategies and supports

mentioned earlier in this training, you will help to reduce these behaviors significantly. However, there may still be times your child doesn't feel safe or is upset. So, what do you do?

- **Do not restrain a child** unless their immediate safety is in danger. There are laws and regulations concerning the restraint of a child to protect their safety, as restraint is potentially dangerous to the child. Only use the most gentle holding you can if it's an absolute emergency and immediately call a LifeKids staff member for help. **Example:** If a child has managed slip past you to exit the building and is about to run into traffic, you will need to gently hold onto them and redirect them back to safety.
- **Keep your eyes on your special LifeKid.** Watch for signs that your child is upset or about to run or lash out. Use redirection to help a child leave a challenging behavior or difficult emotion behind and engage in more appropriate activities. You can often end a potentially dangerous behavior simply by offering the child a calming toy or moving them to a place where they feel safer.
- **If your child wants to escape from your room,** position yourself between the door and the child or have another adult stand non-threateningly in front of the door while you work to get the child involved in a more appropriate activity. If you're in a room like Konnect that doesn't have latching doors, you may need to remove your child to a room that does. **Example:** A LifeKids staff member or Coach can help you escort the child to a closed early childhood room or another safe place.
- **If your child is hurting another child,** immediately have another adult remove the child who was hurt. Focus on your special LifeKid and help them become calm again as quickly as possible. Some children simply can't tolerate having people "in their space." In the future, be sure to keep your special LifeKid at a safe distance so they don't feel threatened enough to hurt another child.
- **If your child is screaming or having a meltdown,** they need your immediate help and calming presence. Don't try to pick up or move a child who's flailing on the ground. Remove other kids from their space so the child doesn't feel crowded. Gently pray out loud for your child. Try offering them their favorite items or sing softly to them. They may have difficulty processing who you are and how you're helping during a full-blown meltdown, but offering all your support and calming strategies can help them return to a peaceful state.

What will I do on the weekend if my special LifeKid isn't there?

It can be difficult for a special LifeKid to attend regularly. The child may be sick more often than their peers or have anxiety issues that hinder their ability to make it to LifeKids every week. Don't worry. You're still needed!

1. **Reach out to the family.** Let your special LifeKid know you missed them. Send their parent a text or a short video of you at LifeKids to say you'd love to see them again next week. Tell them something you're proud of them for, like, "I heard you made it all the way to the parking lot this week. Next week, I can meet you out there and we can walk in together!" or, "I heard you're sick. I pray Jesus helps you feel better fast!"
2. **Write a note.** Send the child you work with a LifeKids note. Your child will feel your support when they receive it later in the week.

3. **Reach out to LifeKids staff.** Having an extra on-call Buddy for any experience is a win for LifeKids. Let your experience coach know you're available for any child who needs extra assistance.

What will I do on the weekend if I don't have a special LifeKid to work with yet?

If you're not currently working one-on-one with a child, you'll be on-call. Here's what that will look like.

1. **Work with your experience coach to identify kids who may need extra support.** Observe from the hall how kids are doing. Decide with your Coach if you should go into a room to help out with an individual kid.
2. **Help with transition times.** Transitions are a great time to support a child who is anxious or unsure during them. You can float between rooms to offer extra help as needed. Take cues from your Coach as they know when key transitions are occurring in the Early Childhood, Konnect, and Loop rooms. (Ending free play, moving to small-group learning, parent pick-up, etc.)

How can I partner with my special LifeKid's family?

The opportunities to serve your special LifeKid's family are limitless. Here are a few ideas!

1. **Ask for permission.** Asking for permission to stay in touch with the parents (or other caregivers) is respectful and shows you care. Ask if it's okay to connect with them during the week via text, email, phone, social media, etc. **Note:** Do not post pictures of your special LifeKid on your social media unless the parents give you permission first.
2. **Send a note.** LifeKids leaders are encouraged to show up in the daily lives of the kids they serve. One way you can is to send a note to the child using the stationary provided by LifeKids staff.
3. **Ask how you can pray.** Ask your family what they're struggling with. Ask if you can text prayers to them. Put a reminder on your phone so you don't forget to pray for the child and their family.
4. **Share some love!** Watch for progress like a hawk—and build up the child's family by sharing it to encourage them. Your child might make eye contact with you for the first time or sit for one minute longer than they did the week before. Share the progress they make in keeping their body calm. Find something positive to share each week!