

Greetings



In Children's Ministries, volunteers are the heartbeat of the community. They show up weekly with patience, energy, and love. And yet, their role can, at times, feel overwhelming! Volunteers fall victim to thinking they need to check off all the boxes on the to-do lists and keep everything running "decently and in order." However, ministry to families isn't about getting everything "right" or perfect.

Children's ministry is messy, fun, and often "organized" chaos. In this unique context, it's about showing up with the right heart—leading with empathy, humility, and compassion to create spaces where every child truly belongs. Below are some helpful training tips you can use with your volunteers.

1. Set Expectations to Honor Each Child

The first step in volunteer training is remembering that every child brings their own way of experiencing the world. Some learn best by listening, others by moving, drawing, or asking questions. Some children may experience sounds, textures, or transitions more intensely. None of these differences are wrong, they are part of the beautiful diversity of God's creation.

 **Tip:** As volunteers, their role isn't to "fix" these differences but to honor them. One of the greatest gifts they bring is presence: noticing, affirming, and walking alongside each child.

2. Sometimes Words Don't Come Easy

The second step is to remember that all children are little humans who are learning how to handle emotions. In a nutshell, they don't always have words for what they are feeling.

 **Tip:** One of the most helpful practices we can train ourselves in is co-regulation. This is the simple act of sharing your calm with a child who is overwhelmed. This might look like:

- Sitting quietly beside a child who feels upset.
- Offering simple choices to help them feel more in control.
- Offering steady presence instead of rushing to redirect.

When volunteers practice co-regulation, they show children that church is not a place where they must meet expectations, but a place where they are free to be themselves.

3. Support Regulation (Not Control)

All kids get overwhelmed sometimes. If a child is upset, lower your voice, get on their level, and say, "I'm here. You're safe." Your calm presence helps them find theirs.

- Normalize movement. Let kids stand, sway, stretch, or hold a fidget while listening.
- Respect body autonomy. Instead of jumping in, ask, "Can I help you with that?"
- Offering a steady presence instead of rushing to redirect.

4. Compassion over Conformity

It can be tempting to measure success by whether every child memorized the week's verse, completed the craft, or followed the schedule exactly. While these pieces have value, they are not the ultimate goal. The heart of volunteer training is this: compassion matters more than conformity. What children need most is not perfect behavior but loving connection.

 **Tip:** As volunteers, when we create flexible, compassionate spaces, children are free to experience God's love in ways that are authentic to them—fostering true ownership of their faith. This is what children will remember: not the checklists or the order of the day, but the experience of being safe, seen, and cherished.

5. Rethink What Participation Looks Like

Some kids listen best while coloring. Others process by watching first. That's not opting out—it's engaging differently. As a volunteer, find ways to:

- Allow parallel play—listening while building with blocks or doodling.
- Don't force group games; offer a quieter alternative nearby.
- Celebrate unique strengths: "You remembered all the song lyrics!" "I love how you helped clean up the markers!"
- Be a Gardener, Not a Gatekeeper: Your role isn't to force growth—it's to tend the soil. What does this room need so that every child can flourish?
- Flexible Structure: Build routines that anchor the day but allow space for sensory needs, emotional responses, and diverse engagement styles.

6. Facilitate Wonder

Ask open-ended questions. Hold space for the unexpected by pausing the plan to follow the child's insight. When volunteers intentionally create space for wonder and curiosity, engagement flourishes. Children discover a safe place—and a safe person—to explore faith and ask questions. This shared space of wondering nurtures trust, allowing faith to grow through compassionate understanding.

At the heart of it all, remember this:

Through empathy and presence, we help children rest in the truth that they are loved.

Volunteers are essential to co-creating a space where kids can encounter the God who already calls them beloved—just as they are.

 **Tip:** A Resource for You

Scan the QR code below to visit

BigFaithResources.com and click on the Downloads tab to find the Neurodiversity Card—a simple, affirming resource that makes an excellent handout for volunteers.

While you're there, you can also sign up for webinars and explore additional resources designed to support you in welcoming all children to engage their faith unhindered.

