

Mobility Challenges

Teacher Training Article • Spring 2020 • Kristy Waldo



Description

Issues with mobility can be caused by many things, including broken bones, chronic illness, and paralysis. Most instances of paralysis are caused by damage to the nervous system, usually the spinal cord. Mobility can also be affected by strokes, cerebral palsy, neuropathy, Parkinson's disease, spina bifida, multiple sclerosis, and amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS). Individuals with any of these disorders may experience problems with mobility to varying degrees. While each individual's challenges are unique, it is our responsibility to make church accessible to everyone.

Ronnie and Aaron's Story (as told by Kristy Waldo)

Ronnie was born without physical impairment, but an accident left him with severe spinal trauma and loss of mobility. He went through rehabilitation to relearn many things. The people who went to Ronnie's church were eager to make sure he could attend. Sometimes that meant rearranging furniture or adding a ramp. Many times, it wasn't just a ramp, but a hand that was outstretched to help. People who were there when Ronnie needed them were a major part of his success. There were setbacks and triumphs in his life, but he continued not only to attend church but also to be a tremendous asset. Today he teaches Sunday school. He was my son's teacher.

My son, Aaron, has had a muscular disorder since birth. He cannot completely open his hands or stretch them over his head. He also has autism. When he was two years old, he had a Sunday school teacher named Wendy. She was determined that Aaron would always be included in any church activity. She held his hand to help him color, clap, and sing. At that time in his life, Aaron wore corrective shoes. He was not able to keep up with kids his age. Wendy made sure that he was able to attend Sunday school, and she also made me feel that it was okay to leave him with her. Sometimes, making the church accessible is more than simply an accommodation. It is the connection that you make when you reach out to help others.

I'm happy to report that Aaron has been baptized and has received the Holy Ghost. I firmly believe that two of the stepping stones that set him on that path were Ronnie and Wendy. Making Sunday school and church accessible for all is the call of the church. It is one of the ways we demonstrate God is no respecter of persons.

Accommodations and Supports

If you encounter a child with a cane or crutches, make sure that her path is clear. Little things like wrinkles in a carpet or cords can be a hazard. Many churches have ramps and a handicap-accessible sanctuary, but the same attention is not always given to other rooms.

Work toward having the child be as active and involved as his peers. Physical accommodations will vary by person but will play a large role in your classroom. Make sure he can get through the door, all of the supplies are within reach, and he can get into and maneuver within the bathroom.

Items such as triangle-shaped crayons for children that have a hard time grasping objects and tables with extendable legs for height adjustment can be helpful.

If there is a child with fine motor problems and the craft calls for cutting with scissors, make sure the craft is pre-cut and ready to be assembled. It may be helpful to assign a peer to help the child with certain crafts.

Practical Tips

If you have a student that has mobility issues, the greatest resource may be right in front of you. Don't be afraid to ask the student.

The teacher's ability to create an engaging atmosphere is directly linked to how much communication there is with the parent or guardian. Parents or guardians can be a great source for information. Parents have the inside scoop on what their child can do. No question is too small to ask. Do not be afraid to ask questions about a disorder or behavior. People learn by asking questions and gaining information.

Make your classroom a stress-free zone when it comes to varying degrees of ability. The class will take their lead from you. If you are polite and inclusive, students will be as well.

Verbalizing your actions can give your younger class a lead that is invaluable. Stating that it's important that everyone has a piece of paper is a more teachable moment than just handing out the paper.

Do not assume impaired mobility corresponds to intellectual ability.

Resources

Book: *You Gotta Have the Want To* by Allen C. Oggs

Website: United Cerebral Palsy (<http://ucp.org>)

Website: Parkinson's Foundation (<http://parkinson.org>)

Website: Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation (www.christopherreeve.org)

Web Article: "Limited Mobility Special Needs Factsheet" from KidsHealth (www.kidshealth.org)

Connect with ABLE

If you have questions regarding special needs, contact ABLE (Accepting, Believing, Loving, Embracing). ABLE Ministry is a program of the Ladies Ministries Division of the United Pentecostal Church International (UPCI) and is dedicated to assisting the special needs and disabled populations within the church and the community. ABLE is committed to increasing awareness about disabilities in the community, the church, and the world. They strive to provide the strength, support, and assistance necessary to meet the needs of those affected by disabilities—physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Facebook: ABLE Ministry UPCI

Website: <http://ladiesministries.com/programs/able>

For further information, email ladies@upci.org or call 636-229-7895



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