



Working With People With Disabilities

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Focus on the Person

Approach people with disabilities as human beings, not as cripples. Even though a person's body is impaired, there is still a human being living inside, and these people need to be treated as such.

Treat the person as if there were no disability present, at least in terms of relating and having a conversation with him.

Be Relaxed

There is a tendency for us to be uptight and uncomfortable around disabled people. Being more relaxed and natural around them really helps. People with disabilities don't want pity or sorrow, but they do appreciate loving understanding.

Reach the Same Level

When speaking to a person with a handicap, it is important to try to be at the same level. For example, a person in a wheelchair must always be looked down at by a person standing up. This makes both parties uncomfortable. A person with a disability appreciates it when a person sits down and talks to him on his own level. Try sitting down sometime and have everyone else stand up and talk to you. You'll get an idea as to what that feels like. When meet-

ing a disabled person, don't draw attention to their disability or make a big fuss over them. It makes them feel uncomfortable.

Ask Before Helping

An appropriate response is to ask, "Can I be of help to you?" If a child requests help, then give it. If not, then stand patiently by and allow him to do his best, even if it means watching him struggle. Don't ever push someone who is in a wheelchair unless they request your help. It is very dehumanizing. Don't ever pat him on the head or touch his face like you would a toddler. You'd never do that to a peer of yours—doing it to a person who is handicapped is very dehumanizing and socially awkward.

Pray Quietly

Don't make a scene in praying for people with handicaps in a service. Being a handicapped person in a charismatic church is the hardest place to be because you become the project before the group. Always

ask permission before you pray for someone, and when you pray, do so quietly and lovingly, not drawing undue attention to him. When a disabled person comes forward for prayer, do not automatically assume it is prayer for healing. Ask him what his request is. It may be a lot different from what you would presume.



Put Yourself in His Place

Put yourself in the place of a person with a disability. Try to feel what he feels and see what he sees. This will give you much empathy in dealing with other people with disabilities and deciding which actions are loving and appropriate.

Questions For Further Study—

1. How do children with disabilities like to be treated?
2. What training can you offer to make your children's ministry more effective in addressing the needs of children with disabilities?
3. What methods can you use to teach the children of your church how to respond to children with disabilities?