

Different Gifts, Same Spirit

Creating a Learning Community Where Everyone Belongs

INTERMEDIATE STUDENT



LIFE EXPERIENCE

Jamie is 10 years old and has used a wheelchair since she was a toddler. Her family just moved here from another part of the country where she attended a school just for children with disabilities. Now Jamie is in Blackwell School with the other children in her neighborhood and will be attending religious education classes for the first time in her life.

Today is Jamie's first day. Her mother parks the van in the accessible space near the church entrance. She wheels Jamie down the ramp and out into the parking lot. Jamie's heart beats very fast as she and her mother get to the entrance of the school building where the classes are held. Jamie remembers when she was little and the other children in her backyard wouldn't let her play in her own sandbox. She remembers when she went back to her locker last week and found taco sauce poured all over her books.

She wants to make friends like everyone else, but sometimes the other kids don't give her a chance. What will it be like in religious education class? Jamie looks up and sees a picture of Jesus laughing and holding the children on his lap. She hopes that she will find the welcoming love of Jesus in her new class.

Imagine that you and your friends are waiting in the classroom to meet Jamie.

- How do you feel?
- What do you say to your friends about Jamie's coming?
- What questions do you ask your catechist about Jamie and how she will fit into class?



FAITH AND SCRIPTURE

St. Paul tells us in his first letter to the Corinthians, “There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same spirit... one and the same Spirit produces all of these, distributing them individually to each person as he wishes.” (1 Corinthians 12)

In our classrooms, there may be many children of many ability levels. Sometimes we can feel uncomfortable with people who look or act differently than we do. We are not sure what to say, so we say nothing. We do not know how to act, so we ignore that other person.

Let’s look at what Jesus did. Jesus spent a lot of time with people who were different and not included in society. Jesus saw the strength and goodness – the power of the Spirit and the remarkable gifts and talents – in each person. He saw others for what they could do – not what they could not do. Jesus refused to focus on differences in walk, in speech, in sight, or in behavior. Also, Jesus knew that people who have unusual physical or mental challenges can teach us about the power of the Spirit within each of us.

REFLECTING ON BELONGING

We can welcome children who have disabilities in many ways:

- by smiling and talking normally to them when we meet them
- by sitting down to be on their eye level if they use a wheelchair



- by learning American Sign Language
- by making sure that people who use wheelchairs can get to and from the classroom without difficulty
- by being patient and firm, yet kind with those who find it hard to stay in their seats and who distract others during class
- by using “people-first” language

“People-first” language means we always put the person (people are most important) first: a boy who is deaf, a girl who uses a wheelchair, a man who is blind. Let’s emphasize the person and be like Jesus when we interact with people of different abilities.

- by using Disability Etiquette. See pages 5-7 for more ideas.

Each of us is a unique creation of God, a blessed and holy person who is part of one body with its community of members.

ACTIVITIES

1. **Word Search.** One way to get to know more about children of all abilities is to use correct language. The word search below will help remind us of some of the terms that we learned today.

Find the following words:

PEOPLE

ACCESS

FIRST

WELCOME

LANGUAGE

BELONG

ACCEPTED

GIFTS

FRIENDSHIP

FAITH

LOVE

ONE



2. **Greeting Card.** A way to connect with children who may have to spend time at home or in a hospital is to send them a card. Using your crayons or markers and construction paper, design a card for a classmate or parish member who needs to receive some cheer or encouragement. Hint: Include your favorite riddle or joke. How about a sticker or bookmark?

3. **Gift Wrap Activity.** We can learn to work together by sharing our gifts and abilities to help one another. If everyone contributes we all feel we belong.

Using these materials, try this activity:

- two long-sleeved shirts (large)
- large box for wrapping
- wrapping paper, tape, ribbon
- scissors

First, set out all wrapping materials on a table. Then, tie the end of one sleeve on each shirt.

Now, two students put on the long-sleeved shirts. With one hand tied in the sleeve, try to wrap the gift by talking and working together with your partner to share your abilities and accomplish the task.

PRAYER SERVICE

At the end of your class, gather around your prayer table. Open the Bible and read 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 with your teacher. At the end of the prayer service your teacher will lead you in the following prayer:

Prayer for Awareness

God, Creator of all, help us to recognize that each of us has abilities and each of us has limitations. And yet we all have a part to play in bringing about Your Kingdom. You love each of us profoundly. In the spirit of gratitude and solidarity, we ask you to increase our awareness of both the gifts and the needs of those around us. Open our hearts, minds and doors to the gifts of every person. Help us to become truly welcoming communities where everyone belongs and finds a place at Your Table. We ask this in Your name, Amen.



Produced and distributed by
Pathways .org TEAM Belong: That Every Ability May Belong
1-800-364-1337 www.TEAMBelong.org

Contributing writers: Peg Bowman, Lois De Felice, Marilyn Krawczyk and Sue Weilgus
With Ecclesiastical Approbation – Archdiocese of Chicago – September 8, 1999

KNOW YOUR DISABILITY ETIQUETTE

Use the tips below so that you know how to comfortably interact with classmates and parishioners of all abilities.

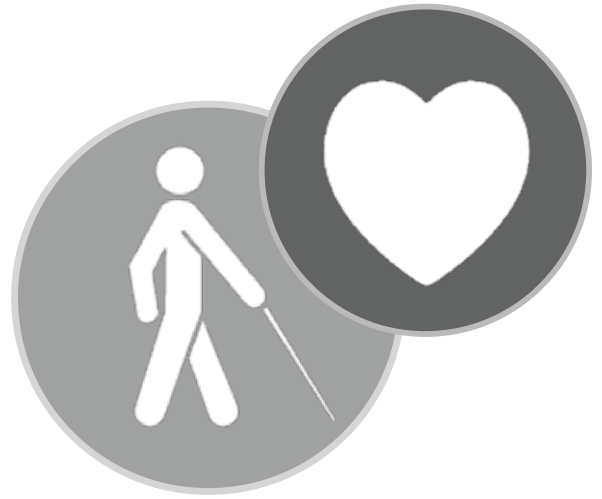
GENERAL INFORMATION

1. What do you say when you meet a person with a disability? How about, “Hello?”
2. A warm smile and friendly conversation are very welcoming.
3. Speak directly to the person with a disability, not only to the family member, companion, interpreter or canine companion.
4. Use people-first language such as “people with disabilities” NOT “the disabled” and “a parishioner who is blind” NOT “a blind parishioner.”
5. Ask the person with the disability HOW you can help. Respect any refusal.
6. Offer accessible seating, large-print bulletins, missalettes, or assistive listening devices. Know where accessible washrooms are.
7. Recognize that each person has gifts and abilities. Ask parishioners with disabilities if they would like to usher, bring up the gifts, proclaim the word, etc. and provide any accommodations needed.
8. Be sensitive to where a person wishes to receive communion – at their seat or at the altar – and make sure they are accommodated.
9. Feel comfortable using words like see, walk, and listen with persons with disabilities.
10. Use accessibility logos in print materials and on signage.



WELCOMING PEOPLE WHO ARE BLIND OR HAVE VISION LOSS

1. Identify yourself when you greet the person. Tell the person when you are about to leave.
2. Talk normally, using your customary voice and typical expressions like “See you later.”
3. Offer your arm when assisting, the same way an usher does at a wedding.
4. Give verbal cues such as “We are going through a doorway.” Explain the traffic pattern with clear, calm instructions such as “Go up the center aisle.”



WELCOMING PEOPLE WITH MOBILITY DIFFERENCES

1. Speak directly to the person.
2. Offer assistance, but accept a “No, thank you.”
3. Sit down so that you are at eye-level if the conversation will last more than a few minutes.
4. Shake hands or lightly touch a shoulder in the same way you would with others.
5. Keep a person’s wheelchair or walker near the person.

WELCOMING PEOPLE WHO ARE DEAF OR HARD OF HEARING

1. Face the person. He/she will appreciate seeing your facial expression and may read your lips. Your face, gestures, and body movements help in understanding.
2. Move closer rather than shout.
3. Speak clearly and slowly. Writing may be necessary. →

WELCOMING PEOPLE WITH SPEECH DIFFERENCES

1. Be patient. Let a person talk at his/her own pace.
2. Remember a person may have communication means other than speech, such as writing.
3. Ask questions that require short answers or a shake of the head. If you cannot understand, rephrase the question.
4. Repeat or paraphrase what was said in order to confirm that you understand.



WELCOMING PEOPLE WITH COGNITIVE DIFFERENCES

1. Greet the person and interact normally.
2. Keep things simple and uncomplicated.
3. Treat people equally regardless of participation level; give prayer books or hymnals to all; allow everyone a chance to speak.