

ADHD

ADHD is one of the most common neurodevelopmental disorders in childhood. It's associated with executive functions, a set of cognitive abilities that help us manage our thoughts and actions, including organization, emotional regulation, self-awareness, time management, working memory, and more. In other words, executive function plays a big role in the types of activities we often give our students at church.

8 Tips For Loving Well!**1. Relationships are key!**

- Children with ADHD thrive when they feel safe and understood.

2. Create a Predictable Schedule

- Use visual schedules
- Timers
- A consistent routine helps build safety and reduces anxiety

3. Give Clear, Simple Instructions

- Break tasks into small steps and give one direction at a time.

4. Give Advance Notice for Transitions

- Use visual or verbal countdowns before changing activities. e.g., “5 more minutes of coloring.”
- Consider a transitional object to carry between activities (like a clipboard or stuffed animal).

5. Offer Fidget Tools or Sensory Supports

- If they are having trouble keeping their hands to themselves
- Use these as tools (replacement behavior), not toys! Help kids learn when they can use them appropriately.

6. Provide Movement Breaks

- Allow for short, structured movement opportunities (e.g., stretch, shake this wiggles out, run an errand).
- Include hands-on activities like crafts or object lessons to keep bodies engaged.

7. Use Positive Reinforcement

- Celebrate small successes and effort, not just outcomes.
- Offer immediate praise

8. Allow Choices When Possible

- Empower the child by letting them choose between two appropriate activities or roles. e.g. “Would you rather hand out crayons or hold the Bible for the story?”

Autism

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurological condition that affects how a person perceives the world and interacts socially. It also involves limited and repetitive behaviors. Autism is currently classified into three levels: Level 1 requires some support, Level 2 needs substantial support, and Level 3 demands very substantial support. Although each individual with autism is unique, some general information can be useful to love them well!

Tips For Loving Well!

1. Relationships are key!

- Children with autism thrive when they feel safe, loved, and understood. When this is accomplished they have space to learn about our great God.

2. Create a Predictable Schedule (they thrive on routine)

- Use visual schedules with “First/Then” language (First story time then play)
- Use timers to communicate when a change of activity is going to happen
- A consistent routine helps build safety and reduces anxiety

3. Ask Question and Listen

- Talking to the child and the parents will always help you find the right support they need (inviting Helen to the conversation is also helpful).

4. Celebrate Strengths

- Find their talents and invite them to serve.

Understanding Challenges

Please remember that each person is unique, but here are a few common challenges they have that we should understand so we can love well.

1. Trying Something New

- New is out of the routines they thrive on. But another challenge is doing something new means making assumptions and that is tough for them. Think about the task of getting ready to leave the house: brush teeth, floss, shower, brush hair, pick out clothes, put those on, hydrate, use the bathroom, gather everything you need for the where you are out. One simple statement that we think everyone will just know what to do.

How can you love well?

- Give clear, specific directions for each step of the new task
- Allow time and patience for them to ask all their clarifying questions
- Send another student with them to help them if needed.

2. Sensory Overload

- Be aware that excessive noise, activity, smells, textures, and other environmental stimuli can sometimes overwhelm students with ASD. Feeling overstimulated may cause a student to shut down or act out.

How can you love well?

- Offer some headphones
- Offer a fidget
- Offer a quiet walk
- Take them to the sensory room for a five-minute break

3. Managing Emotions

- With this as a challenge, they can get frustrated and not cope in an appropriate way.

How can you love well?

- Remember safety first
- Try coping skills: taking deep breaths (do it with them), talk to them about their feelings, allow them to sit off to the side for a bit, and then invite them to join the group after 5 or 10 minutes.
- The big emotion could be the result of a sensory overload. Follow Sensory Overload for more ideas.
- When a student exhibits challenging behavior, assume positive intent. Understand that he is likely NOT trying to be difficult; instead, they are simply coping with a challenge. Approach with empathy and assist them in finding solutions.

4. Social Situations

- Socializing can be challenging because many students struggle to interpret nonverbal cues like facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice. They also find it hard to read between the lines when the spoken words do not match the actual intent, such as with sarcasm. Since most communication relies on nonverbal signals, this can cause students to misunderstand messages and respond in ways that are not appropriate.

How can you love well?

- Model inclusion by regularly inviting them into the group and valuing them. However, if a student prefers to have their space, respect their wishes.
- If a student responds inappropriately and is confused by others' reactions, then help him understand better by being kind and clear about the social expectation.
- Inviting their peers to be intentional about compassion and inclusion can make a big difference in acceptance.