

**THE PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL
OF THE ECCLESIASTICAL PARISH OF LITTLE HEATH
(Registered Charity No. 1133045)**

Children With Additional Needs Policy

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:12)

At Christ Church we are an inclusive church that welcomes people, young and old, to build them up in the faith and love of Christ Jesus.

Leaders are only with children in different groups for a short amount of time each week E.g. Sunday school is one hour a week. So, it is essential that we work hard to build relationships with children and parents. This document should be read alongside Christ Church's Behaviour Management Policy.

The Child

When a parent or carer completes a form for a group they may or may not disclose that their child has additional needs. Therefore, we need to take a holistic approach and consider the whole child and their unique combination of strengths and areas of difficulty. If the parent or carer have informed, you that their child has additional needs then please find time to sit down with them and discuss the following:

- Find out their interests – what they like and dislike
(Remember that these likes, and dislikes will change)
- Find out if they have any triggers e.g. loud noises, objects (balloons for example)
- Do they have any rituals/obsessive compulsive behaviour e.g. will always want to use a certain colour pen and would find sharing stressful? Sitting in same place each week.

If, however additional needs have not been discussed or disclosed we will:

- Spend some time talking to the child about these things and make a note of what they say.
- Speak to the parent or carer about what they have said to you.
- Remember that it is very difficult to get a Statement for a child and sometimes a child's needs are not deemed severe enough. Children are not always able to get an early diagnosis of certain conditions or parents may be waiting for a referral and have nothing concrete to work with.
- Always be sensitive to the fact that some parents may not be willing to accept that their child has additional needs, or the child is able to hide their condition well.

Coping Strategies

Many children get anxious starting new activities. This may be because they don't know anyone, what to expect or where things are. For children with additional needs these anxieties can be even more heightened.

We will:

- Allow the child to gradually join a group or activity and discuss this with the parents and if appropriate the children or young person. It may be that they struggle attending the whole session or just struggle with particular activities e.g. team games, talking to peers.
- Give them a choice but the options are of YOUR choosing not theirs. We will not force them to do anything they don't want to do.
- Support the emotional and social needs of the child by giving them more time to express themselves, repeating instructions clearly, showing them what to do by doing it ourselves or sitting next to them in a group activity to prompt them.
- Plan and prepare for transitions during the session. E.g. visual timetables, showing a child the room before the session, where they can sit etc.
- Meet with parents and child regularly, at least every half term to find out if there are any changes to their needs E.g. likes/dislikes/triggers

Resources to use:

- Visual timetables – Pictures with words underneath and make sure they are up in a prominent place every session.
- Now and next boards – Use a small whiteboard and you can have this next to you or near child
- Clear routines and structure – try to keep some consistency. E.g. time of bible teaching/where they sit for certain activities. Refreshments at a certain time.
- Specialist resources – sensory box or bag with toys in e.g. Fidget spinner. Remember this is their special bag not the groups. Be specific with the children in the group as to who can use it and if only one child you could label it with a card luggage tag, so it is easy to take names on and off the bag.
- Special cushion for that child so they know where to sit for different activities.

Speaking and Listening

Speaking and listening activities promote social interaction within sessions. For some children social interaction is extremely difficult and they don't always know how to interact with others.

To help children we will:

- Structure talks or games so they are clear, and everyone gets a chance to talk. They can also tell a friend what they think if speaking in front of others is too much.
- Remind the group of the rules, respect for each other, no shouting over each other etc.
- Use Body language to show a child that we are listening to them. Turn towards them, make eye contact, get down to their level. But be aware of personal space.
- Reinforce that we are listening to them by using some of the words they used in your reply.

E.g. I think David was brave fighting Goliath.

Yes, I agree David was brave. Why do you think he was brave?

Clear Communication

Children can see things in a very black and white way so be accurate. For example: if you want them to go over to a certain colour state that colour clearly. E.g. a red cushion may be a crimson cushion to a child with additional needs.

Don't be vague in your answer to questions. E.g.

When are we having a drink?

In a little while. – This does not answer the question

In five minutes. or Straight after this bible talk. – Answers the question clearly

Communication and Feedback

It is vital as a Leader of a children's group that you communicate and build relationships with parents but make sure that you are also communicating with the other helpers and leaders who work with the child with additional needs in your group or other groups. This relates to their likes/dislikes/rituals/triggers. Remember, these can change so keep people in the loop. If a parent has mentioned a change in behaviour to you then feedback to others so that they are aware. We are all working for the same goal – to glorify God by building children up in faith.

Dealing with Difficult Situations

Children can have complex needs and it is important that you understand how difficult they can find expressing themselves.

Sometimes children will refuse to do an activity. If this happens give them two choices only. This will be the activity and then another activity of **your** choosing.

E.g. Child: "I don't want to do the crossword."

Leader: "You can complete the crossword, or you can colour in the picture. You can decide."

If you don't give them choices their behaviour and that of the group will rapidly decline.

E.g. Child: "I don't want to do the crossword."

Leader: "That's ok, you don't have to."

Then the child gets bored so decides to occupy themselves by running around the room in a circle. Other children in the group see this and soon most of the group are running around the group in a circle!

Remember:

- **Children can refuse to do an activity.**
- **Give them two choices only: the activity and then another activity of your choosing.**
- **Be aware it can take a child a few moments to decide or they may make the statement again. Repeat their two options**

Dealing with unacceptable behaviours

Whenever possible leaders will use this de-escalation script when dealing with anti-social/unacceptable behaviour:

Child's name

I can see that something has happened

I am here to help

Talk and I will listen

Come with me and...

This de-escalation script aims to remove judgment, blame and disempower negative behaviours. It allows children to feel they have a voice and know their side of the story is considered, making them more open to conversation and consequences.

It may take children with additional needs longer to calm down and talk: give them time. Acknowledge that you can tell that they are upset/angry etc and that you will wait until they are ready to talk. Ask them open-ended questions and repeat what they have said to show you are listening.

A child may get very upset – don't panic! Some children find it difficult to express how they feel verbally and so can cry. Give them time to calm down.

Running Out / Leaving a room

- When upset some children want to run away and hide, other children try to test authority /boundaries by running away or leaving a room.
- If they successfully leave or run away do not follow alone, you must have another adult with you.
- Make sure your group ratios allow for additional adults.

- Follow at a distance but as soon as they are off the premises call parents or carers and Police.
- Children tend to look back at the adults following rather than a road etc, so it is important you do not follow.
- In a building or area (e.g. playing field), it is safe to follow at a distance.
- Use the de-escalation strategy.