

**Involve Training Materials and Activities:
A Guide for Teacher Training**

**by
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Preface

The Involve Project started in 1999 with a survey of Unitarian Universalist (UU) churches concerning the challenges encountered trying to minister to children and youth with special needs labels. While still working part time for the UU Urban Ministry in Boston, I wrote seven Involve newsletters for religious educators funded by the Unitarian Sunday School Society and published on the UUA website. This led to me leaving the Urban Ministry and receiving a grant from the UU Funding Program to write my book, **Welcoming Children with Special Needs: A Guidebook for Faith Communities**, which was published in 2004 by the UUA. The Veatch Fund at Shelter Rock continued my funding for two years to train religious educators around the country.

During these past 14 years with the Involve Project, I have conducted approximately 85 Involve workshops and trainings ranging from 4 to 15 hours, which translate into approximately 1,500 participants. I have also given several sermons and talks, consulted with many churches, and written **A Faith-Based Sexuality Education Guide for the Inclusion of Children and Youth with Special Needs** to go with the OWL curricula. I am ending the Involve Project where I began – writing a guide for religious educators to be used in conjunction with my book, this time to be part of the congregational certification program on welcoming and supporting people with disabilities and their families in our congregations.

Since Involve started, I have been blessed to meet, train, and work with many dedicated and compassionate religious educators. I hope they have learned as much about ministering to atypical children as I have learned from them. It has definitely been a collaborative process of changing our minds in our faith communities about welcoming the children we label as special needs or disabled. The community of religious educators encompasses everyone who ministers to children: directors of religious or lifespan education, ministers, lay leaders, parents, grandparents, teachers, mentors, brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, friends, anyone who is part of a child's life – in other words, our entire UU community and beyond.

I have seen attitudes change over the years since the Involve Project started. In 1999 information and help about ministering to children with the special needs label was scarce. In 2013 I can say with some confidence that most religious educators now have access to the knowledge and resources to create a welcoming ministry. Part of this change has been due to the Involve Project, and a lot is due to the commitment of religious educators to be welcoming to all children. I have been enriched to be part of our caring religious education community and their willingness to embrace the most marginalized among us.

Now it is time to end the Involve workshops. It is time to hand over the reins to all those religious educators ministering to children and youth. Over the years I have written about and created many activities to raise our awareness about atypical children as part of my Involve workshops. I am pleased to offer this compilation of my training thoughts, ideas, and awareness activities in conjunction with the **Disability/Ability Action**

Program Handbook. I hope this teacher training guide will add to the already vast amount of knowledge and creative ministry for children and youth with special needs labels. The original intent of the Involve Project was always to train religious educators to be self-sufficient. With this guide, this intent is honored and the Involve Project is complete.

Once again I would like to gratefully thank all the organizations that funded the Involve Project over these many years: the UU Funding Program, the Veatch Fund at Shelter Rock, the Unitarian Sunday School Society, the LREDA 21st Century Fund, the UUA, and all those districts and churches that paid for my transportation and accommodations and my fee when expenses could not be covered any other way.

Even though the Involve Project has ended, my website will remain as a resource. In addition, I am still available for consultation.

Blessings,

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Introduction

Can UU faith communities be welcoming places for all children and youth that cross the thresholds into our churches? Do we want to make this commitment? If we do, how does our ministry to children and youth change – or does it need to change? Will we need to restructure the church? How will the existing curricula change – or does it need to? Who will need to be involved? How do we change the attitudes of the people in the congregation?

It is important to explore all of these questions if we as a denomination want to minister to all children and youth. Answers to these questions also have profound implications for our ministry to adults with disabilities. Our understanding of differences and gifts will be challenged and will inevitably change. Can we restructure our church services to accommodate people with different cognitive or attention abilities? Our culture's penchant for labeling all children's behavior that does not fit within a narrow definition of "normal" will come under serious question. Does it make spiritual sense to participate in this labeling? As a faith community can we minister differently and with compassion?

Committing to be leaders in this effort requires that we come to an understanding not only of our own responses to those we label, but also an understanding of how the structures in our churches contribute to difficulties in ministering to children and adults that have been labeled as disabled and often exist on the margins of society. Can we perhaps forge a new structure and ministry? Committing ourselves to this effort could open up possibilities for an entire new way of doing worship. Making the commitment to be welcoming to all can be exciting as well as spiritually fulfilling for everyone involved. But it will not be easy. It may cause people to question their beliefs and their vision of a faith community.

For example, would we want to structure our services to be more welcoming to different populations? Can we tolerate odd behavior in our worship service? Is the current separate RE programming what we want to see as part of our lifespan faith development, or do we want to explore how to more completely integrate our programming for children and adults? These are questions that a faith community will need to wrestle with if they want to be welcoming to children, youth, and adults who have been labeled with a disability.

While using these Involve Training materials, it will be important as religious educators to explore and be aware of your own feelings, anxieties, and beliefs concerning children with special needs labels. It will be helpful to establish your own philosophy and vision within the context of being a Unitarian Universalist. In these training materials we start by exploring what labeling does to children and our response to children as a result of the label. Next, Judith Snow's giftedness and disability paradigms and how they affect our ministry to children are explored. Only after several activities aimed at developing an attitude of care for all children will there be activities focused on teaching techniques.

These training materials are to be used to train RE teachers to be more comfortable and compassionate about teaching atypical children whose behavior or needs for support at times can be challenging. This guide is designed to be used in conjunction with the book, **Welcoming Children with Special Needs: A Guidebook for Faith Communities**, and the guide, **A Faith-Based Sexuality Education Guide for the Inclusion of Children and Youth with Special Needs**. The Welcoming Children book is available at the UU bookstore. The Sexuality Education Guide and this Involve teacher training guide are available for free download from www.embracechildspirit.org.

This guide is organized as if I were giving a six-hour workshop. This structure seems most appropriate for teacher training. If you have less time, then choose what you feel is most needed. However, I urge you **not** to skip the activities that focus on attitudes. Knowledge of all the teaching techniques in the world will not help someone who is afraid of atypical children or who only sees children by their labels. As I say often in my training, we do not have to like a child's behavior in order to embrace the child.

After the basic training, I include some of the additional teaching activities that were part of the longer 15-hour training. You may find these activities more helpful in meeting specific needs. And finally, I offer handouts, prayers, and songs that I used in my training. Please adapt everything to the needs of your teachers. I will reference where to find information and training activities in my book; however, it would be very helpful if you read the book first before conducting your teacher training so you can familiarize yourself with what is available.

The faith-based sexuality guide contains some updated information since the book was published. Some of the information is helpful whether or not you are conducting the OWL program. For example, I have added information that is not in my book on how to use mentors to help with atypical children.

While these training materials were developed to help us minister to and teach atypical children, they are relevant for all children. So often people avoid training that focuses on children with special needs labels, thinking it does not apply to them. As a result, we often end up speaking "to the choir" instead of the people we think would benefit more from training.

When offering training to your teachers and others, try to spread the message that the training benefits all children. Teachers learn to think "outside the box" and thus become more creative about their teaching, which benefits all children.

Almost all the awareness training activities are also transferrable for awareness training concerning the adult population with disabilities. Understanding the effects of ableism benefits everyone. The following training activities are easily transferrable for awareness/sensitivity training concerning adults with disabilities.

- Understanding the Effects of Labels – The Giftedness vs. Disability Paradigm
- Choosing Hope by Reframing Negative Descriptions

- Why Does Being a UU Call Us to Minister to Children and Adults with Disability Labels? (appendix)
- Disability Awareness (appendix)

Ableism

In my Involve workshops and thus these training materials, I tried to develop activities that focus on developing attitudes of care and understanding for atypical children. Over the years I have gradually progressed from using the term children with special needs to children with special needs labels or the term “atypical” to describe children with special needs or disabilities. I feel these descriptors lessen the effects of ableism. Most of my training activities are designed to question the use of diagnostic labels to describe a child because they can box children into a set of expected behaviors and thus become self-fulfilling prophecies. The term “atypical” emerges from the neurodiversity movement. Some people are either more neurotypical or atypical than others, but we are all part of a rich neurodiverse world.

I highly recommend the following book to help understand the type of awareness training that is most effective for people learning about the negative effects of ableism: **Disability Awareness – Do It Right! Your All-In-One How-To Guide: Tips, Techniques & Handouts for a Successful Awareness Day**, from the Ragged Edge Online Community, Mary Johnson, Editor. The disability rights movement has problems with the traditional disability awareness training in which someone is blindfolded or sits in a wheelchair in order to foster awareness of what it’s like to have a disability. These types of simulations almost always are designed to focus on the impairment, rather than on the social experience of having a disability. These simulations result in what they call in the book the “newbie gimp syndrome” when all people learn is how awful it is to have a disability. In one short exercise, no one can begin to understand the years of experience that people with disabilities have coping with their disability, nor will they begin to learn that having disabilities does not have to be a horrible experience. It is lack of access and unfair treatment that are the hallmarks of ableism, and that are not taught in simulation exercises. Some people develop an attitude of, “I’ve experienced what it is like for fifteen minutes and now I can provide solutions for you,” which in the book they call the “Know-It-All Effect.”

And finally, not all kinds of impairments can be simulated. “Many kinds of disabilities – cognitive impairments, behavioral and emotional difficulties – are ones that cannot be simulated easily or at all. Impairments that are easy to mimic – orthopedic impairments, vision loss, and hearing loss – are, not coincidentally, the least stigmatized in society. And it is stigma, far more than impairment, which defines the core of the disability experience – and the thing that it would most profit participants to learn about.” (Do It Right, page 21)

People think the problem is the impairment because most public activities “on behalf of the disabled” are related to helping them lessen their impairment, rather than working to end discrimination, as we do when we create programs to help people who are gay or people of minority races or women. Many people with disabilities are also stuck in the “medical model” of treatment. The problem is seen to be that a person cannot get into the building because s/he cannot walk. If the person could walk it would not be a problem. However, ableism is actually the problem, which means that people do not

think it is necessary to have an accessible building. By viewing people from the “medical model,” we believe that all we need is to find a way for the person to walk. And that is where the money goes to researching for a cure. You can use this line of reasoning with any type of disability label.

The following training activities are designed to look at the effects of ableism from many different directions. The idea is that the impairment or different behavior or way of thinking is not the problem; it is our reaction that is the problem. We cannot change or fix a person; we can only change our attitude about a person. This attitude adjustment is the focus of all the Involve training activities.

Directions, Tips, and Information About the Training Activities

In your roles as Directors of Religious or Lifespan Education, I assume most of you have either received or participated in UU training. So, hopefully I will not repeat the obvious.

- I found that a parking lot is extremely helpful for managing questions, especially for a long training session in which a lot of information has to be covered. A parking lot is a sheet of paper from an easel pad posted on the wall. With self-stick notes, participants are encouraged to write their questions down and post them on the paper. The presenter will then schedule time in the workshop to answer the questions. This practice allows a presenter to hold a question to answer at a more appropriate time or because the question will be answered later during the training.
- I liked to structure my training as a spiritual workshop so I started with the lighting of the chalice, a prayer, and a song. I also always ended the workshop with a prayer and a song. If it were a six-hour training, I included another song after lunch. You will find suggestions of some prayers and songs in the appendix.
- In order to emphasize that adults and children listen and process information in many ways and also to model what to do for energetic children during the church service, I always provided colored pipe cleaners for the participants. I asked the participants to make something for the altar. Usually by the end of the workshop the altar was covered in wonderful creations.
- At the beginning of the workshop, I liked to remind the participants that “suffering is optional.” They were welcome to go to the bathroom or to get up to do calisthenics if needed, so long as they were mindful of their neighbor. I always scheduled at least two 10- to 15-minute breaks.
- The training activities I have provided are the ones I consistently used in my six-hour workshops. There are more activities provided in the appendix that were used for the fifteen-hour training. Some of these may be more useful for your teachers. I especially like the activity exploring what it means to be a charismatic adult.
- In addition, there are training activities for teachers described in my Welcoming Children book starting on page 61. Some of these activities are similar to and some are different from the ones describe in this guide. You may find those activities more useful for your teacher training; they can be substituted for one or more of the following activities. **Again, please do not skip the activities designed to focus on one’s attitudes toward atypical children.**
- And just a reminder, these activities comprise a six-hour training. They are presented in the order I found the most effective for creating a compassionate teaching ministry for atypical children. Additional activities are included in the appendix.

- For ease of writing when referencing my book, **Welcoming Children with Special Needs: A Guidebook for Faith Communities**, I have shortened the title to Welcoming Children. I try to include page numbers for reference whenever possible. Similarly, titles of other books are also shortened after they are referenced by full title the first time.
- There are many resources listed in the back of Welcoming Children, if you want more ideas or help. Obviously there are many more resources since the book was published in 2004; however, the book's list is a start.
- The appendix includes additional training activities, the handouts I mention in the training activities, prayers, and songs. Also in the appendix is a list of resources that are mentioned in this guide.
- **And finally, one of the most important techniques I learned during training is to use stories to illustrate ideas.** Stories keep people engaged and emphasize the human dynamic of the training, which is that children and families can be dramatically affected by how we minister and teach. I told stories that RE Directors have shared with me, and I also told stories about my atypical son. I have shared a few of the stories in this guide. Certainly you and your families have your own stories to tell. Stories will be especially powerful if they come from your own congregation.

An Introduction for the Training Activities

This Introduction is a compilation of the ideas I offered at the start of every workshop before engaging in the training activities. The purpose was to build an understanding of why creating a welcoming ministry to all children is a natural as well as a sacred function of a faith community. I also wanted to convey that when this welcoming happens, everyone experiences spiritual healing. You are invited to use your own words as well as your own thoughts and ideas as you introduce the activities to your RE community.

It is appropriate for faith communities to discuss atypical children from a spiritual perspective – not only to understand what it means to be an inclusive community ministering to people with multiple differences, but also to prepare religious professionals and lay leaders to provide meaningful and effective pastoral care for families as well as effective and caring teachers. When we view children with labels from a spiritual perspective, we usually see them in alternative and affirming ways that differ substantially from the mainstream professional views of these children. This perspective also helps us understand the effects of ableism as previously discussed in this document.

Ableism means that society focuses on the impairment rather than the attitudes that create barriers to full inclusion. When we see past the labels to the whole child, then the focus shifts from treating or fixing the child to dismantling the barriers that prevent the child's full participation in society. Overwhelmingly the professional community focuses on the child's deficits and problems, and ways of fixing the problems. Parents are exposed to these mainstream views on a daily basis. When parents approach a minister, lay leader, or religious educator for advice or pastoral care, most are not looking for the same information but want help exploring the complex moral, ethical, and spiritual meaning of why they have an atypical child. Therefore, it makes sense that this training for a spiritual setting provides alternative, life-affirming perspectives in contrast to many conventional views.

Children with special needs labels are already in our churches. Some churches handle them well and others do not. The primary difficulty churches have in successfully welcoming children with special needs labels is attitude – attitude about children's place in church and attitude about atypical children. A church with an attitude that the children's program should be totally separate from the adult service and other aspects of the community will have more difficulty welcoming children with disability labels. How we treat our children spills over into being able to welcome adults who are labeled or are different. In all my Involve presentations I emphasized attitudes first, then the teaching techniques. If we can develop a welcoming attitude, one not based on fear of a child who is different, then the rest of what needs to be done falls into place.

The Involve trainings look at inclusion as a spiritual practice within faith communities that embrace the concept of radical hospitality. St. Benedict's rules for the practice of

radical hospitality were written for his monks; however, they also provide a wonderful model for individuals and for faith communities to live by.

For St. Benedict, practicing hospitality was a way of love. St. Benedict asks that we see the divine in every single adult and child we encounter. In their book **Radical Hospitality: Benedict's Way of Love**, Father Daniel Homan and Lonni Collins Pratt say that St. Benedict's hospitality is not about social graces but about mutual reverence. In our faith communities it is about accepting those who are different. Acceptance is not about judging or condoning. It is about embracing. We do not have to like a child's behavior in order to embrace and accept the child. Welcoming all children into our faith communities is an act of radical hospitality. It can help heal labeled children's sense of alienation and injustice, and lead to deeper spirituality for everyone in the faith community.

Training Themes: Our Attitudes About Children Shape How We Teach and Minister – Can We See the World Through the Child’s Eyes?

Purpose:

- To provide explanation and organizational themes for the training activities

Materials and Handouts:

- Handout #1: Involve Training Themes and Topics

Time: 5 minutes

Planning Notes:

- Write themes and training topics on easel pad.
- Think about how you would explain each theme.

Procedure:

One of the ways we can become more accepting of the children we label is to find ways to see the world through the child’s eyes. By doing so, we can drop assumptions about behavior and instead see the divine shining in each child. When we can see the world through the child’s eyes, often we can become much more creative about including children in the life of the church community.

Read and explain the following themes. I have provided some thoughts in parentheses.

Training Themes:

- **When children are safe and loved, everyone is safe and loved.** (I gave examples of what would happen if all our laws were designed to only keep children safe. Inevitably adults would also be safe.)
- **Before congregations can encompass a ministry to children with special needs labels, they must first be a place that weaves children into the overall fabric of the church community.** (If a congregation does not know how to embrace children, then how can it embrace adults and children who are perceived as different?)
- **The labeling of children can become a self-fulfilling prophecy.** (This theme is a primary focus of the training activities.)
- **People with disabilities are us, not them.** (We have a tendency to think that people with disability labels are only those in a wheelchair, or those who are autistic and so on, and thus are others, not us. Yet when we explore this assumption, we realize that we have family members and friends who have had a heart attack, are physically impaired because of age, have disabilities such as a learning difference, have allergies, are depressed, etc.)

- **We live in a world that defines people by what is wrong with them. Can we create a church community that sees differences as gifts?** (Read through the training activity that corresponds with the theme for explanation.)
- **In our faith communities, can we create moments of transcendence for every child?** (Read through the training activity that corresponds with the theme for explanation.)

The training activities are organized according to the following topics.

- ✓ Understanding the effects of labels – the giftedness vs. disability paradigm
- ✓ Choosing hope by reframing negative descriptions
- ✓ Modeling caring behavior
- ✓ Listening to children’s stories – the gift of a question
- ✓ Developing a positive behavior supports philosophy
- ✓ Creating a welcoming and inclusive RE ministry – strategies to make RE less like school
- ✓ Teaching to different ways of learning and knowing
- ✓ Creating moments of transcendence
- ✓ Engaging the entire church community in inclusion

Training Activity: Understanding the Effects of Labels – The Giftedness vs. Disability Paradigm

Purpose:

- To explain the two paradigms
- To promote the use of the giftedness paradigm in our churches

Material and Handouts:

- Ask participants to use a piece of paper.
- Quote from Judith Snow in Welcoming Children, page 4.

Time: 15 minutes

Planning Notes:

- I consider this to be the single most important activity for addressing attitudes.
- I often prefaced the following activity by asking participants if anyone wrote positive affirmations as part of a spiritual practice. I mention that the following activity might be counter-intuitive for some people but if they stay with the exercise, it will be meaningful at the end.
- Locate and mark the Judith Snow quote from Welcoming Children, page 4, so it is available to read.

Procedure:

Directions:

On one side of a sheet of paper ask the participants to write the word “deficits” at the top of the page. Then ask them to list four to five areas in which they either struggled in school, or things people told them they were not good at, or criticisms that stuck, or things they do not like about their personal appearance. (I always joke that some people start writing a book, noting that if people find this exercise difficult, that is good.)

On the other side of the sheet of paper ask participants to write the word “gifts.” Then ask them to list five to six things they like about themselves, their strengths, what they are good at doing, what they like about their appearance, or recognitions they’ve received. In other words, the side of them they wish people would see. (I find it helpful to make this list longer than the deficit list.)

Ask the participants to hold the paper against their chest with the deficit side facing out. Reassure them that the exercise is just for them and no one can read their paper. Then repeat the following in your own words.

Close your eyes and take a few minutes and imagine that everyone you meet only sees this side of you. They only talk to you from this perspective. What would the conversations be like, and how would you feel? When you want to talk about something you feel good about, the person only responds to what they see on the front of your

piece of paper. They only see the deficits and they may try to fix you. How do you think you would react and treat them?

Now hold the sheet of paper next to your chest with the gift side facing out. Take a few minutes to imagine that the people you meet can only see this side of you. They only talk to you from this perspective. What would the conversations be like, and how would you feel? They see all your strengths and gifts and probably think you can take care of yourself. They do not try to fix anything. How do you think you would react and treat them?

Information and Explanation:

Children who have been labeled with a disability or disorder, or who have not been labeled but are perceived as destructive and needing a label, walk around as if they have a piece of paper plastered to their chest labeling all their deficits. In this society we have a tendency to want to fix these children. We hear a child is autistic, and we immediately assume that child will be difficult to handle. We hear a child is cognitively impaired, and we assume that child has limited abilities. We hear a child is struggling in school, and we assume that child is not very smart or is just lazy. We hear a child has attention deficit disorder (ADD), and we assume he or she will be a troublemaker. We see a child in a wheelchair, and we assume that person cannot be included in all activities. And then, we expect all of these children to behave according to our assumptions about their behaviors and their limits. Our expectations often become a self-fulfilling prophecy. And yet we wonder why some of our labeled children are so angry and so difficult.

We also may have a child in our group who is being disruptive, or is difficult to handle, or is acting bizarrely, but the parent has not provided a diagnosis or a label. And we want that label so we can figure out what to do with the child. We figure the label will provide a clear path of treatment.

Now imagine that you are a parent with a child labeled as having ADD or bipolar disorder. There is constant pressure to medicate. All your parenting skills are continually being tested and called into question. You fight the schools, your child, and maybe your partner on what to do. Every week you hear from the professionals, from friends, and from strangers about what is wrong with your child. By the time you get to church, maybe all you want is one hour of peace. (To illustrate what it is like to be a parent of an atypical child, I told a couple of stories concerning my child and the misunderstanding of professionals. Perhaps you can tell a story of your own or have some parents of children with labels tell some stories of what it is like for them.)

We live in a world in which we define people with disabilities by what is wrong with them, and then we feel sorry for them and they become “special,” and then they are entitled to services. Then the fight becomes us vs. them. Judith Snow, a woman who can only move her thumb, travels the United States speaking about her vision of an inclusive society. **Please read the passage from Welcoming Children about Judith Snow’s “disability paradigm” and “giftedness paradigm” (page 4).**

Most of our culture including the professionals, doctors, many teachers, and other school professionals operate within the disability paradigm in which we decide that being different means it has to be fixed. Even though special education laws have been a godsend for parents in guaranteeing that their children receive educational services, these laws perpetuate the “deficit model” of thinking. I am deeply thankful for the law because it meant I had the power to make the school system provide appropriate education for my child. I also realize that sometimes a diagnosis brings relief after years of confusion and often suffering because now there is a reason for the difficulties and a method of treatment.

However, a diagnosis can be a double-edged sword that can lead to a “fix-it” approach rather than seeing the whole child. Also, as we experienced in the labeling activity, a diagnosis can lead to assumptions of expected behavior based on the label. So, have we gone too far? Are we more narrowly defining what is normal so more and more children are getting the special needs label? **While the rest of the world operates from the disability paradigm, we can definitely operate from the giftedness paradigm in our churches.**

When we talk about hospitality in our churches, we are addressing issues of inclusion and exclusion or, as Judith Snow defines it, disability versus giftedness paradigms. Inclusion and exclusion are not just about people with disabilities. Our entire culture excludes people based on labels, differences, color, sex, race, religion, age, dress, income, schooling – the list goes on and on.

Father Homan says, “Hospitality has an inescapable moral dimension to it. It is not a mere social grace; it is a spiritual and ethical issue. It is an issue involving what it means to be human. All our talk about hospitable openness doesn’t mean anything as long as some people continue to be tossed aside. . . . Hospitality puts an end to injustice. But calling hospitality a moral issue does not tell us the whole truth about hospitality either. A moral issue can become bogged down in legalisms, and hospitality is no legalistic ethical issue. It is instead a spiritual practice, a way of becoming more human, a way of understanding yourself. Hospitality is both the answer to modern alienation and injustice *and* a path to a deeper spirituality.” (**Radical Hospitality: Benedict’s Way of Love**, page 5)

Being able to see the world from the child’s eyes means being willing to drop the labels and assumptions. As Father Homan says, “The walls only come down when the labels are changed into human faces.” (page 28) Being radically hospitable means accepting the Divine presence of every child – not just the ones who behave well and look like angels, but also the ones that challenge, act out, and sometimes even seem cruel. These next activities are a few ways to help re-focus negative descriptions of a child, or to focus on a child’s spirit rather than the unacceptable behavior. Hopefully the activities will encourage a change in attitude to help alleviate previously difficult interactions with a child.

Training Activity: Choosing Hope by Reframing Negative Descriptions

Purpose:

- To help participants learn to see the world through each child's eyes
- To provide techniques for re-visioning each child

Materials and Handouts:

- Handout #2: Reframing Negative Descriptions (Armstrong quote)

Time: 20 to 30 minutes

Planning Notes:

- Put Thomas Armstrong quote on easel pad.

Procedure:

Read the following Thomas Armstrong quote.

Instead of thinking of the ADD child as . . . Think of him or her as . . .

hyperactive	energetic
impulsive	spontaneous
distractible	creative
a daydreamer	imaginative
inattentive	global thinker with a wide focus
unpredictable	flexible
argumentative	independent
stubborn	committed
irritable	sensitive
aggressive	assertive
attention deficit disorder	unique

Dr. Thomas Armstrong, **The Myth of the ADD Child: 50 Ways to Improve Your Child's Behavior and Attention Span Without Drugs, Labels, or Coercion**

Directions:

Ask participants to toss out words to describe children who are seen as difficult or who push everyone's buttons. Write these words on one side of the easel pad. Then ask the participants to come up with alternative, more positive words for the negative words, and write them on the opposite side of the easel pad. Do not try and make this into an intellectual exercise. The idea is to find ways to see the child from a more positive perspective so we can respond from a place of caring and love rather than attempting to merely control the negative behavior.

With this activity it is helpful to mention that both the negative and positive words to describe a child are based on assumptions. Therefore, we might as well use the positive assumptions. Ask the participants to think about how they react to someone who is feeling negatively toward them. Children respond to positive caring adults and their behavior will change as a result.

Explanation:

If you have a child in your program who pushes all of your buttons, or who is so different you do not know what to do with him or her, this is a valuable exercise to do. The exercise can help you see the child from the gifted paradigm perspective, and open up possibilities of meaningful interaction. The exercise can also help you start thinking outside of the diagnostic label's box of expected behaviors, which focus on deficits rather than the child's strengths.

When our buttons are pushed, it is never about the child, it is only about us, informing us about what is inside that causes us to be upset about a child's behavior. If people do not understand this concept, ask them to consider why two adults can have totally different experiences of the same child's behavior – i.e., why one adult may be upset and the other may not.

Also be sure to mention that not all atypical children have difficult and challenging behavior. However, it is those children exhibiting disruptive behavior that teachers are constantly asking for help in managing.

The following list includes a few of the negative words people often used to describe children with disruptive or difficult behavior:

- Rude
- Mean
- Destructive
- Bossy
- Lazy

You will find that participants will come up with many, many negative words. If you have parents of an atypical child present, they will tell you many of the words that have been used about their child. I have also found that participants will be very creative about coming up with a more positive word. For example, for "bossy" one could use the word "leader"; for "rude" one could use the word "authentic."

The word "rude" is a perfect example of how it is never about the child's behavior. For example, a boy with Asperger's syndrome who characteristically does not understand social cues is not being deliberately rude if he tells me that I have a huge pimple on my chin. He's just telling the truth. If I feel embarrassed because I do not want anyone to notice my pimple, it is my problem – not the child's for mentioning it. In addition, cultural and family traditions influence people's perceptions of what is considered rude behavior.

Training Activity: Modeling Caring Behavior

Purpose:

- To help participants see the world through a child's eyes
- To provide techniques for re-visioning each child

Materials and Handouts:

- None

Time: 10 minutes

Planning Notes:

- Prepare stories to illustrate modeling caring behavior or use some of your own.

Procedure:

Stories and Explanation:

One story I used involved a young man with a diagnosis of ADD who was labeled the troublemaker in the church. Let's call him Henry. Whenever anything went wrong, Henry was blamed, even when it was not his fault. A new DRE came to the church and knew Henry in a different context, and she thought he was terrific. The DRE was amazed at the destructive culture that had grown up around the boy. So she started modeling caring behavior. First, she stopped blaming Henry for everything that went wrong. Then, she gradually started talking about how much she liked Henry and mentioned his talents in front of other adults. He was a violinist and so the DRE had Henry play his violin at the worship services. Gradually she changed people's perceptions of Henry. His behavior also improved when he started feeling how much people appreciated him for his gifts.

Sometimes modeling caring behavior, even when your heart is not in it, leads to awareness and meaning. It is okay to "fake it until you make it." The following story was shared by a DRE who had worked with a family with a child with severe disabilities. She felt it was extremely difficult and just wished the family would leave the church. They eventually did leave because the father was transferred to another town. After a year, the DRE received a letter from the mother thanking her for trying to include her child. Since the family had moved, they had been unable to find another church that would welcome her child into the faith community. This honest story is a reality: sometimes it is very difficult to be welcoming, and sometimes the effort feels like too much. This DRE was bemoaning that she did not try with a better attitude, but in the end she was very glad she did try and was changed as a result. So "faking it until you make it" is a very acceptable way of coping until you find a way to open your heart.

Resources: The story about Henry perfectly illustrates many of Dr. Lavoie's teaching about developing a positive behavior supports philosophy, which is included in *Welcoming Children*, page 40, as well as in a later training activity. It is also a good example of finding "an island of competence" as described by Dr. Robert Brooks and

Sam Goldstein in **Raising Resilient Children: Fostering Strength, Hope, and Optimism in Your Child**, and referenced in *Welcoming Children*, page 39.

Training Activity: Listening to Children's Stories – The Gift of a Question

Purpose:

- To honor what our children are experiencing
- To develop good listening skills

Material and Handouts:

- Information from Welcoming Children, page 24
- Handout #3: Listening to Children's Stories – Give Yourself the Gift of a Question (the art of good listening)

Time: 20 minutes: 5 minutes explanation, 5 minutes one person listening, 5 minutes the other person listening, 5 minutes discussion.

Planning Notes:

- Have available page 24 in Welcoming Children, which talks about being a good listener.
- Write the following on the easel pad:

The art of good listening is:

- ✓ To be present,
- ✓ To be nonjudgmental, and
- ✓ To be nondirective.

Procedure:

Explanation:

Give yourself and the child the gift of a question. We make so many assumptions about why a child acts the way he or she does and we are often wrong, but we make judgments about the child based on assumptions that his label implies.

The following story about my son Tyler is from my book, **Don't Fix Me, I'm Not Broken: Changing Our Minds About Ourselves and Our Children** (pages 41-42). Either read it to the participants or come up with a comparable story to illustrate the value of asking a question and listening without judgment.

When Tyler was in kindergarten, he insisted on fantasy dressing every morning before going to school. He wanted to be a ninja turtle, a power ranger, or superman, to name just a few of his fantasy characters. I allowed myself to go slightly crazy each morning arguing with him to dress in normal clothes and then finally giving in. I just thought he was being overly creative. I was always on a tight schedule trying to make breakfast, get two children off to school, exercise, meditate, get dressed and make the train in time to go into Boston for my full-time job. I did not take the time to listen to what Tyler was telling me by wanting to dress up as a fantasy figure every morning.

One afternoon when Tyler and I were alone together, I asked him why he could not dress as Tyler to go to school. He answered that he could not be Tyler and he started to cry. This one question and my willingness to listen allowed me to see life through Tyler's eyes. It was a wake-up call, a confirmation from those niggling thoughts in the back of my head that something was not quite right. I now understood his dressing as a fantasy figure was a creative coping strategy. I became his ally instead of constantly fighting him in the morning. We chose what he would wear the night before. Then my creative side also was engaged. We talked about his interests, which were fish and dinosaurs. He then created a wonderful dinosaur and a fish out of wood. These props allowed him to dress in normal clothes while being a paleontologist or an oceanographer. It had the unintended benefit of the teacher and children seeing his artistic gifts rather than focusing solely on what he could not do.

It is amazing what a question followed by unconditional listening will do for a struggling child, an adult, and yourself. The lesson of not making assumptions about my children's behavior or other people's behavior is something I have to learn over and over again. I can still get caught in an argument with my children or my spouse and then realize I am making assumptions about behavior, judging, and not listening.

Take time to listen to the child's story, ask why, and then listen without judgment. If a child feels we already know the answer and are not really listening, then they will not tell their story. We rarely take the time to listen to children's stories. As with my story about Tyler, taking the time has enormous benefits.

Directions:

The following exercise gives participants a brief experience in learning to be good listeners. The technique is adapted from **Power Dialogues: The Ultimate System for Personal Change**, by Barry Neil Kaufman. Read the three components on listening unconditionally and the explanation for each component to the participants (page 24).

Split the participants into groups of two. Mention that we are going to practice the art of good listening. Tell the participants to think of a situation with a child in their church that they are having difficulty resolving. If they cannot think of a situation, then they can talk about a problem they are having with their own children, or a problem in their own lives. One person listens and just asks questions while the other person talks. Then after five minutes, people switch roles. Explain that the object is not to give advice; just listen and if necessary ask a question. Participants may ask questions for clarification only, not (for example), "Have you thought of trying . . . ?" This question is an attempt to give advice.

Next, have a general discussion on how it felt to just listen without giving advice. Remind people that solutions that come from within are more likely to be successful in healing than ones that have worked for someone else. Giving advice usually ends up

being all about the person giving advice and their own problems rather than what is needed, which is unconditional acceptance.

If a child is consistently acting out, it is time to meet with him or her one on one, ask a question, listen to the child's stories, and engage that child in figuring out how he or she can help the situation. Often teachers do not have time to do this, so then the DRE needs to step in. For some of these children, it may take time to gain their trust. Children know immediately when an adult is going through the motions but does not really care for them. Asking the question, "Jeremy, why did you act so belligerent?" obviously will not elicit any information. Asking Jeremy about his day, what he likes, does not like, etc. will gain you valuable information and Jeremy's trust.

Resources: Dr. Ross Greene has developed an extremely useful collaborative problem-solving approach for behaviorally challenging youth and their caregivers. On the website, www.livesinthbalance.com, Dr. Greene provides videos of how to question children so they learn to trust themselves and learn to control their own behavior. It is the most compassionate, hopeful, and effective process that I have ever encountered. I highly recommend it.

Training Activity: Developing a Positive Behavior Supports Philosophy

Purpose:

- To learn how to teach to meet children's diverse needs
- To discuss teaching techniques

Materials and Handouts:

- Handout #4: Developing a Positive Behavior Supports Philosophy

Time: 45 minutes for explanation and questions

Planning Notes:

- Adapted from Richard Lavoie, "When the Chips Are Down: Strategies for Improving Children's Behavior" video and guide.
- Please read about this approach in Welcoming Children, pages 38-45, where I provide an extensive explanation of the following information. In addition, on pages 31-45 I describe teaching techniques.

Procedure:

Directions:

Distribute the handout. After you have familiarized yourself with the support philosophy points, read them to the participants and then give illustrations and discuss.

Explanation:

In order for positive teaching strategies to be successful, it is critical that we as religious educators and teachers change our attitudes about children who are disruptive and develop a behavior support philosophy based on care and concern for the child. The following concepts are eight ideas for helping us develop such a philosophy. (I do not want to suggest or imply that children with special needs labels are difficult. But this area is where I have been consistently asked for information.) My book covers the teaching techniques based on the positive supports behavior philosophy. With any of the points made below, please provide your own examples and stories as illustrations.

We minister to all children, and some of these children have special needs and special challenges.

By now, most of you understand that one of the primary themes of my training is to look at the whole child instead of seeing only the limitations or deficits implied by the labels. Unfortunately, often when we are told that one of the children in our program has oppositional defiant behavior, then that is the behavior we expect. If we are told that we have a child with autism in our program, then we expect weird, isolating behavior. There is a difference between knowing a child has difficulties and expecting behavior

based on the perceived limitations; and being prepared for a child who struggles and expecting the best from them.

Over and over again studies have shown how children respond to teacher expectations. In one study, teachers were told that they were getting a class of exceptional students, when in actuality the students had been low achievers and considered failures. Other teachers were told that they were getting a class of low achievers, when in actuality the students had been high achievers. During the year the under-achieving students performed extremely well, equal to the high-achieving students, and the high-achieving students under-performed. Teacher expectations do make a difference. **Remember, children who have been labeled with a disability are first and foremost children.**

Any child would prefer to be viewed as bad rather than dumb.

When given a choice most children, especially adolescents, would prefer to be viewed as disruptive, disobedient, and disrespectful than to be seen as incompetent or incapable. Children with disabilities are routinely seen as weird, special, stupid, incompetent, and the dumb kids that go to the resource room in school. If we are not careful, our RE programs can be a set-up for the same type of stereotyping. Be aware of creating any type of circumstance in which a child appears stupid in front of his or her peers. The child will automatically become disruptive and prefer to deal with the teacher's anger rather than feel humiliated in front of peers. An example of this set-up is asking a question of a child when you know they do not have an answer.

Children with difficult behavior are distinguished by their regrettable ability to elicit from others exactly the opposite of what they need.

Often the child who is most disruptive is the child who most needs compassion, empathy, and love. Disruptive behavior may be the only way that child knows how to get attention. It is helpful to look at destructive behavior as a call for love. The most important thing to remember is that children will do anything to preserve their self-esteem; therefore, do not take their behavior personally.

The hurt that troubled children and youth cause is never greater than the pain they feel.

Lavoie's words convey this best, "Children who are experiencing trouble at home or at school often feel powerless and hurt. Their response to these feelings is often inappropriate . . . they become disruptive and disrespectful. The parent and professional must remain mindful that this behavior is rooted in the pain of rejection, isolation, and fear that they are experiencing. Therefore, the most effective strategy is to attempt to eliminate the causes of these feelings . . . not to attempt to simply modify the behavior." Think about it: do you think the child really wants adults to be always mad at him or her? Adults control children's worlds.

In our RE programming our children should not have to adapt to our curricula. We should be adapting our curricula to the needs of our children.

If our children are not responding well to the curriculum we are using, then we must teach the way that they learn. Most churches I know have a tendency to use a lot of cerebral, pencil-paper activities. Adapt each lesson to meet the needs of the children in your RE class. For example, if a child is struggling to read, do not make him or her read just because the curriculum suggests it.

A disruptive child needs adult attention.

A child that is being disruptive in an RE program is doing it for attention. Lavoie says, "You can ignore the behavior . . . but you cannot ignore the need." Try to create positive ways for the child to get attention to lessen the habitual disruptive ways the child has learned to get attention. Giving attention only for positive behaviors probably will not get immediate results, but over time, if you are consistent, it will help. (Try using Dr. Brook's "island of competence." See pages 39 and 43 in Welcoming Children.)

Children can only control their own behavior and performance and should not be compared with others.

Try to avoid comparing the behavior of children who are difficult with children who are acting in acceptable ways. Because a child can only control his or her own behavior, the RE teacher should only focus on improvements in the child's behavior and should not compare one child's behavior with anyone else's. What typically happens in this scenario is that the children who are compared will learn to dislike each other, or one will feel superior.

There is nothing more unequal than the equal treatment of unequals.

This concept is often difficult for many adults to understand. Yet I feel that it is vitally important that we understand this reality. Usually, parents of a child with a special needs label understand it very well. We know that to be fair to all our children, we must treat each child differently. Recognizing their different strengths, abilities, and needs, we respond accordingly. There are times when the child with a special needs label requires more of our time, attention, and resources, but it does not mean that we are being unfair to the other children. Just the opposite usually happens in our schools and very often in our churches.

Children who excel, play an instrument, do well in school, and win awards are praised all the time while the child with a special needs label gets attention for being disabled or disruptive. Is this fair? Is it fair to set up a situation in which the children who behave appropriately (the ones who always get positive attention) can go on a church outing while those children who struggle with appropriate behavior are always excluded? When we treat all children the same, the ones who struggle are constantly and

consistently left out. **Being fair is not about treating all children equally. It is about making sure all children's needs are met.**

Training Activity: Creating a Welcoming and Inclusive RE Ministry – Strategies to Make RE Less Like School

Purpose:

- To create a welcoming and inclusive RE ministry
- To give an overview of some of the teaching techniques in Welcoming Children.

Materials and Handouts:

- Reference material in Welcoming Children, pages 31-45

Time: 30 to 45 minutes depending on questions

Planning Notes:

- Read the material in Welcoming Children, pages 31-45.
- Note the information for teaching the anxious child.
- Prepare the information for the easel pad.

Procedure:

Directions:

Familiarize yourself with the material and prepare to discuss it.

Explanation:

Once we have the attitude, then it becomes easier to create interesting and inclusive Sunday morning lessons. In a six-hour training, I do not go into a lot of teaching techniques. However, the most important teaching technique for creating a successful Sunday morning RE class is preparation in two critical areas: room environment, and knowing your children.

1. Room Environment

- **Is the room inviting and welcoming?**
- **What does the room convey about expected behavior?** (I used an example of a classroom set up with learning stations around the walls of the room so there was a corridor in the middle that invited the children to run. Once some of the learning stations were moved to break up the space, the running behavior stopped.)
- **Are there visible, attractive cues as to what the children are learning each morning?** (For example, all children – especially those who process information differently – benefit from seeing pictures posted next to the main written words conveying the idea of the morning's lesson.)

2. Know Your Children

Make sure each teacher knows who the children are who are attending their class. Be sure that each teacher knows if they have a child with a special needs label and any teaching techniques that have worked with the child. This information is critical.

What often happens is there is a change in teachers after several weeks and the new teacher has no idea who will be in the group and never receives the information of what has worked successfully with a particular child. I hear stories over and over again of a mother preparing one teacher only to have the next teacher fail to receive the information. I recommend having the DRE meet with each teaching group prior to the next teaching session in order to pass on such critical information.

Write the following strategies on the easel pad, use the comments from Welcoming Children, pages 32-34, and then discuss them.

- Mix age groups and use learning centers.
- Provide more experiential activities.
- Engage children in storytelling instead of having them read out loud.
- Provide visual cues.
- Be consistent and always explain what is coming next.

Training Activity: Teaching to Different Ways of Learning and Knowing

Purpose:

- To understand one's own preferred way of learning and knowing
- To become familiar with Howard Gardner's eight intelligences
- To be able to plan a lesson using one or more of the eight intelligences

Materials and Handouts:

- Read pages 50-52 in *Welcoming Children* about ways to use multiple intelligences (MI) in the RE program.
- Handout #5: Overview of Multiple Intelligences
- Handout #6: UU Principles

Time: 60 minutes: 10 minutes to read about MI, 15 minutes to form groups, 20 minutes to plan a lesson, and 15 minutes for each group to share

Planning Notes:

- Be aware of the number of participants so you can divide them into groups.
- Write the following multiple intelligences on an easel pad:

Bodily/Kinesthetic
Logical/Mathematical
Verbal/Linguistic
Visual/Spatial
Musical/Rhythmic
Interpersonal
Intrapersonal
Naturalist

(Since my book was written, Gardner added a ninth intelligence called existentialist, which describes individuals who yearn to pursue existential or spiritual matters.)

Procedure:

Explanation:

Ask who is familiar with Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences. If several people are unfamiliar with his theory, then give an explanation (see pages 45-52 in *Welcoming Children*).

We are a culture that is dominated by the verbal/linguistic and logical/mathematical ways of thinking. Focus on these two types of intelligence predominates in our schools. Children who think and learn differently or use other types of intelligence are often labeled as learning disabled. My son is a right-brained child in a left-brained world. Increasingly, however, our culture is relying on visual/spatial type of intelligence, which

often goes unrecognized as a legitimate learning style in our schools. While it is difficult to change an entire school system to teach to children's different ways of learning and knowing, we can definitely change how we teach in our churches. Making this shift is another way to make religious education less like school and capture the attention of children who then willingly return to church each Sunday.

Directions:

Distribute the handouts. Have the participants read Handout #5, which describes the multiple intelligences, then have them decide what their personal strongest intelligence is. Divide into groups of four or five, and assign each group one of the intelligences: bodily/kinesthetic, visual/spatial, musical/rhythmic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. (Note: Unless you have lots of participants, leave out logical/mathematical because it can be challenging to use in a church setting. Also leave out verbal/linguistic because it has to be used no matter what intelligence is emphasized. And if you still need to eliminate one of the intelligences because of low participant numbers, then the next one to eliminate is naturalist.) Have each group select a scribe to record the group's work.

Assign a UU principle from Handout #6 to each group. Have each group design an RE lesson for mixed ages, kindergarten through 6th grade, to explore the meaning of that UU principle. They are to use the assigned intelligence as the base for developing the RE lesson, but obviously the groups will also use other intelligences, such as verbal/linguistic. Give the groups at least 20 minutes to create the format of a lesson.

When the participants return, ask each group's scribe to share what principle they were assigned, which intelligence they were using, and what they created for an RE lesson.

The UU principles are listed below, with a suggestion of an intelligence match for each principle appearing in parentheses.

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person (Bodily/Kinesthetic)
- Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations (Naturalist)
- Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations (Musical/Rhythmic)
- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning (Intrapersonal)
- The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large (Logical/Mathematical can be used here if needed.)
- The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all (Interpersonal)
- Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part (Visual/Spatial)

Training Activity: Creating Moments of Transcendence

Purpose:

- To free participants from always using written materials
- To foster a feeling of what transcendence means to each participant
- To create an environment in which “mud-puddle” experiences can occur for children

Materials and Handouts:

- Find the “engaging in transcendence” quote and activity in Welcoming Children, page 63.
- Handout #7: Creating Moments of Transcendence

Time: 50 minutes total: 5 minutes to think of a joyful moment, 5 minutes to form groups, 20 minutes to plan a worship service, and 20 minutes to share

Planning Note:

- Be aware of the number of participants so you can divide them into groups.

Procedure:

Explanation:

Distribute Handout #7 and then read the following quote from Myers and Myers:

Often we want to “give the ocean” to young children when splashing in the “puddle” is enough. We fall into this trap by the ways we choose to share our adult faith with our youngest children. In our hurry to communicate our faith, we often assume that words are the most effective vehicle. Yet by using only words, we may fail to engage children in those common mud-puddle experiences where God is most visible, such as sitting on a loved person’s lap and hearing a story, helping to bake bread, sharing a doughnut, or going with someone for a walk. These are the simple ways by which adults nurture and tend to the religious experiences of children.

The institutional church, unfortunately, often overlooks such participatory experience and substitutes a canned curriculum for such common, ordinary happenings. “Canned curriculum” here means a printed, generic curriculum that assumes anyone can use it. The question then becomes, Who can “fill the slots” to “teach the curriculum”? Such an approach often avoids the necessity of providing ongoing relationships and does not promote experiential interaction on the basis of the adult’s familiarity with and understanding of a child’s world.”

Barbara Kimes Myers and William R. Myers,
**Engaging in Transcendence: The Church's Ministry and
Covenant With Young Children**

It is important to realize that “mud-puddle” experiences cannot always be planned. Often they are created out of a serendipitous moment. These moments are unique to the individual. What will be meaningful for one child will not always be meaningful to another. What we can do as teachers is create a nurturing atmosphere in which moments of transcendence or going beyond can emerge. The structure and environment of the “Spirit Play” program with its emphasis on fostering a sense of wonder is a good example of this type of atmosphere. In order for teachers to create the circumstances where moments of transcendence happen, it is important that they examine what transcendence means to them.

The following story about my son Tyler illustrates a moment of transcendence:

I usually sang in the choir if I was not teaching and sometimes I would bring my two children with me to choir practice before the service. Sometimes Tyler would stay in the sanctuary to listen rather than going to childcare. On this day when Tyler was 8 years old, his sister was not with him. While the choir was practicing, the minister was putting out the candles of joys, sorrows, and concerns. She noticed Tyler and asked him to help her. I could tell they were having a long, engaged conversation about something.

During the service I sat in the choir loft while Tyler sat with some friends. When the minister asked if anyone would like to light a candle, Tyler jumped up and came forward and announced that he was lighting a candle for his teacher who was having a baby. I was stunned. Tyler had a word retrieval problem and was terrified to speak in public. He even had difficulty talking in his small class of six students in his special school. I had tears in my eyes as friends who knew Tyler gave me hugs. Many people in the congregation who also knew Tyler were also affected. This was a moment of transcendence for Tyler, myself, and the people in the congregation. And it was made possible by a minister who took the time to engage a small boy, listen, and help him prepare ahead of time. Also it was made possible because Tyler felt comfortable in a church that welcomed and appreciated him.

Directions:

Ask participants to think of a time when they were children when they experienced a moment of complete joy. Some people call this moment of joy a spiritual experience, but it does not have to be defined that way. Have the participants raise their hands when they have thought of such a moment so you know when to continue. If they are someone who had a traumatic childhood, then they can think of a joyous time when they were an adult.

Divide participants into groups of three or four. Have them share their moments with the group, if they want to. Then have each group pick one moment of joy and develop a Sunday morning intergenerational service around that moment of joy. Often the moments of joy are similar so a theme can be chosen. **Remind the participants that there will be a mixed range of abilities present among those attending the service,**

as well as children and adults with differences in the congregation – for example, individuals with autism, orthopedic impairment, learning disabilities, etc. Make sure someone in each group serves as the scribe in order to share the group's lesson/program when the groups return.

Ask the scribe for each group to describe the moment of joy they chose and the worship service they created.

Training Activity: Engaging the Entire Church Community in Inclusion

Engage the entire church community in the effort through sermons, discussion groups, and special programs. The **Disability/Ability Action Program Handbook** outlines ways to do this.

Discuss the possibility of forming a small group whose purpose is to help a family with an atypical child become part of the church community. Please read my idea about forming a support group for families with an atypical child on page 25 in *Welcoming Children*. It is also possible for a support group to be part of a small group ministry.

Judith Snow's Joshua Group is a good example of a model support group. Remember in the Bible, Joshua broke down the walls to Jericho. This image symbolizes what Judith's Joshua Group did for her. They broke down the barriers that prevented her from being the best of who she could be. They helped her manage the daily functions of everyday living, such as getting dressed in the morning, fixing meals, and transportation. Read the quote by Mike Green about his experience of being part of Judith Snow's Joshua Group, on page 25 in *Welcoming Children*. Green concluded from his experience that inclusion was a spiritual practice and that it needs to be experienced to be felt.

Please read the story on page 177 in *Welcoming Children* about a boy with schizophrenia and how he was welcomed into his church. This story gives meaning to Margaret Mead's famous saying: it takes a village to raise a child. Well, sometimes it takes an entire congregation to minister to one child. Discuss what this commitment would mean in your church community.

APPENDIX:

Additional Training Activities

Handouts

Opening and Closing Words and Prayers

Songs

Additional Resources

Additional Training Activities

Training Activity: Visioning – Why Does Being a UU Call Us to Minister to Children and Adults with Disability Labels?

Training Activity: Disability Awareness

Training Activity: Can We Be Charismatic Adults in a Child's Life?

Training Activity: Can We Build a Utopian Church Community?

Training Activity: Imagine You Are a Child with a Disability Label

Training Activity: Visioning – Why Does Being a UU Call Us to Minister to Children and Adults with Disabilities?

Purpose:

- To establish a connection between our principles and our ministry to children and adults with disability labels

Materials and Handouts:

- Handout #6: UU Principles

Time: 20 minutes

Planning Notes:

- Review the UU principles.

Procedure:

For each principle, ask for a volunteer to read it, then have participants make comments about whether or not ministry to children and adults with disability labels applies and why. Write down the comments on an easel pad.

Training Activity: Disability Awareness

Purpose:

- To raise awareness that disability is us not them

Time: 5 minutes

Planning Notes:

- Review the questions so you are not constantly looking at notes.
- Review this activity and explanation in Welcoming Children, pages 7-8.

Procedure:

Directions:

Ask people to raise their hands if any of the following questions apply to them, and to leave their hands up until all questions are asked.

- Who has a disability? (A few people will raise their hands.)
- Who knows someone with a disability? (A few more people will raise their hands, but most will not.)
- Next ask, how many know someone who has had a heart attack?
- How many know someone who suffers from arthritis?
- How many know someone who struggles with learning to read?
- How many know someone who is depressed?
- How many know someone who is an alcoholic?
- How many know someone who is in chronic pain?
- How many know someone who has asthma?
- How many know someone who is constantly anxious?
- How many know someone who is hyperactive and totally disorganized?
- How many know someone who uses a cane or a walker?
- How many know someone who uses a hearing aid?

Explanation:

When asked about disabilities, most people think only of physical disabilities.

The following quote is from Welcoming Children, page 8:

This activity clearly demonstrated that people with disabilities are not *other* people but rather our friends, our families, and ourselves. All of us will probably have to cope with disability in our lifetimes – our own or that of someone we love. Creating an accessible church is about creating a welcoming church for ourselves.

Training Activity: Can We Be Charismatic Adults in a Child's Life?

Purpose:

- To foster the feeling that all of us can be charismatic adults in children's lives

Materials and Handouts:

- Read about charismatic adults in *Welcoming Children*, page 64.

Time: 15 minutes

Planning Notes:

- For more information on charismatic adults, please read "Ideas for Teaching" in the chapter on mood disorders in *Welcoming Children*, pages 137-139.

Procedure:

Explanation:

According to Robert Brooks and Sam Goldstein in their book, *Raising Resilient Children*, a charismatic adult is someone who cares and loves unconditionally, someone who advocates for the child, someone from whom the child gathers strength. Charismatic adults provide opportunities that reinforce "islands of competence" or strengths and foster self-esteem. All of us can be charismatic adults in children's lives. In order to feel comfortable in the role, it is helpful to regain a sense of who was important in our lives when we were children.

Often we do not know when we have become a charismatic adult in a child's life. Serving in that role can be (but does not have to be) a long-time commitment. Sometimes it is just a small encounter with a child that can make a difference. It might be taking the time to talk to a child at coffee hour and listen unconditionally, or going for a walk, or chatting with a child during a break. You never know what will make a difference. However, being a charismatic adult in a child's life definitely comes from an attitude of care and concern, and a liking for the child.

Directions:

Ask the participants to think of adults who were important and made a difference in their lives when they were children and youth.

On an easel pad, record their responses to the question, "What traits, attributes, or characteristics did these adults have that made them special?" Responses might include traits such as good listeners, nonjudgmental, compassionate, trusting, etc.

Training Activity: Can We Build a Utopian Church Community?

Purpose:

- To help participants realize what is involved in ministering to a struggling child
- To foster an awareness that everyone benefits

Materials and Handouts:

- Read about this activity in *Welcoming Children*, page 61-62. In the book, I handle this case scenario differently than I do here.

Time: 30 minutes

Planning Notes:

- On the easel pad write the quote, “Can you create a utopian church community around the suffering of one child?” (I adapted this quote from a short story by Ursula K. LeGuin, only in her story the community actually thought their utopian community could only survive on the premise that one child had to suffer. Obviously this “single child suffering” is not what I want to happen with this exercise.)

- Underneath the quote, write this description of Fred:

Fred is 10 years old. He has difficulty with understanding social cues and what is appropriate behavior in differing circumstances. When other children come into the Sunday group, he’ll pick out one child and cling to them and demand their attention for the entire morning. He has terrible difficulty transitioning from one activity to the next and ends up screaming if he gets too frustrated. He constantly interrupts the teacher and the other children when they are talking. As a result many of the other children do not feel comfortable coming to their Sunday morning group anymore.

- Make two columns on the easel pad titled **WHO** (who would make it happen) and **WHAT** (what would have to happen).

Procedure:

Explanation:

Discuss the definition of utopian community. Be sure participants realize that in a utopian community everyone is happy. Therefore, in creating a ministry for Fred all the children have to feel safe and cared for, and everyone needs to benefit – not just Fred. Discuss the idea of whether there are people in a congregation who would not agree with the idea of being called to minister to a struggling child. Can we relate this ministry to our UU principles?

Directions:

Read the quote and ask the participants who would have to be involved and what would have to happen, and then write the answers under the two columns.

Training Activity: Imagine You Are a Child with a Disability Label

Purpose:

- To help participants feel what it is like for a child with a disability label to go to their church
- To provide a means for discussing the various disabilities
- To develop empathy

Materials and Handouts:

- Handout #8: Descriptions of Children with Disability Labels and Their Experiences in Church

Time: 60 minutes: 15 minutes to visualize, write, and reflect; 45 minutes for discussion

Planning Notes:

- Read the disability descriptions in *Welcoming Children*, pages 66 and 70-74.
- It would also be useful to read the chapters on the various disability labels because this activity will generate questions from the participants about the various disabilities.

Procedure:

Directions:

Distribute Handout #8. Each participant receives one description of a child. There are seven descriptions; therefore, more than one person will receive each description.

Ask participants to read their description. Tell them that this activity is to help them imagine what it would be like to be this ten-year-old coming into their church on Sunday morning for the first time.

To help the participants visualize walking through a typical Sunday morning experience through the eyes of this ten-year-old, ask the following questions:

- How is your family greeted?
- Is there someone there to help you and your parents find your room?
- How does your teacher react?
- How do the children react to your disability, or how do the children react to your strange behavior?
- Can you easily participate in the activities that are planned or are they too complicated or too intimidating?
- Are you confused?
- Do the children talk to you or ignore you?
- Do you feel like everyone is staring at you or are they comfortable with your presence?
- Does the teacher pay too much attention to you or not enough?

- Do you feel included?
- At the end of the session do you feel like you want to return?

After the visualization, ask for a volunteer to read one of the descriptions and then comment on what it felt like to be this child and then what their church could do to help this child feel more comfortable. Repeat this process until all the descriptions have been read and comments shared.

Explanation:

Usually participants ask for more information concerning each disability described. More information can be found in Welcoming Children in the disability chapters.

Handouts

Handout #1: Involve Training Themes and Topics

Handout #2: Reframing Negative Descriptions

Handout #3: Listening to Children's Stories – Give Yourself the Gift of a Question

Handout #4: Developing a Positive Behavior Supports Philosophy

Handout #5: Overview of Multiple Intelligences

Handout #6: UU Principles

Handout #7: Creating Moments of Transcendence

Handout #8: Descriptions of Children with Disability Labels and Their Experiences in Church

Handout #1: Involve Training Themes and Topics

Themes:

- When children are safe and loved, everyone is safe and loved.
- Before congregations can encompass a ministry to children with special needs labels, they must first be a place that weaves children into the overall fabric of the church community.
- The labeling of children can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. People with disabilities are us, not them.
- We live in a world that defines people by what is wrong with them. Can we create a church community that sees differences as gifts?
- Can we create, in our faith communities, moments of transcendence for every child?

Topics:

The training activities are organized according to the following topics.

- ✓ Understanding the effects of labels
- ✓ Reframing negative descriptions
- ✓ Modeling caring behavior
- ✓ Listening to children's stories
- ✓ Developing a positive behavior supports philosophy
- ✓ Creating a welcoming and inclusive RE ministry
- ✓ Engaging the entire church community

Handout #2: Reframing Negative Descriptions

Instead of thinking of the ADD child as . . . Think of him or her as . . .

hyperactive	energetic
impulsive	spontaneous
distractible	creative
a daydreamer	imaginative
inattentive	global thinker with a wide focus
unpredictable	flexible
argumentative	independent
stubborn	committed
irritable	sensitive
aggressive	assertive
attention deficit disorder	unique

Dr. Thomas Armstrong, **The Myth of the ADD Child: 50 Ways to Improve Your Child's Behavior and Attention Span Without Drugs, Labels, or Coercion**

Handout #3: Listening to Children's Stories – Give Yourself the Gift of a Question

(Adapted from **Power Dialogues: The Ultimate System for Personal Change**, by Barry Neil Kaufman. See also *Welcoming Children*, page 24.)

The attitude of a good listener is comprised of three components. You can be a good listener to yourself and your children. Use this attitude when asking yourself or others the questions that follow.

To be present is to be fully and completely attentive, curious, and energetic. A good listener is free of thoughts about oneself and other concerns.

To be nonjudgmental is to make no judgments about what the person is talking about – no right, wrong, good, or bad. Being nonjudgmental also means being free of assumptions and totally accepting of what the person is saying, trusting that they know best for themselves.

To be nondirective is to have no agenda and no expectations as to outcomes; to trust that the person is his or her own best expert. (No advice.)

Handout #4: Developing a Positive Behavior Supports Philosophy

(Adapted from Richard Lavoie, "When the Chips Are Down: Strategies for Improving Children's Behavior" video and guide. See also *Welcoming Children*, page 40.)

- We minister to all children, and some of these children have special needs and special challenges.
- Any child would prefer to be viewed as bad rather than dumb.
- Children with difficult behavior are distinguished by their regrettable ability to elicit from others exactly the opposite of what they need.
- The hurt that troubled children and youth cause is never greater than the pain they feel.
- In our RE programming our children should not have to adapt to our curricula; we should be adapting our curricula to the needs of our children.
- A disruptive child needs adult attention.
- A child can only control his or her own behavior and performance and should not be compared with others.
- There is nothing more unequal than the equal treatment of unequals.

Handout #5: Overview of Multiple Intelligences

(From Welcoming Children, pages 47-48, and based on Howard Gardner's work.)

- **Verbal/linguistic intelligence** allows individuals to communicate and make sense of the world through language. Poets exemplify this intelligence in its mature form. Students who enjoy playing with rhymes, who pun, who always have a story to tell, who quickly acquire other languages (including sign language) – all exhibit linguistic intelligence. Amy Tan, Alice Walker, and Will Rogers are good examples of this intelligence.
- **Musical/rhythmic intelligence** allows people to create, communicate, and understand the meanings of sounds. While composers and instrumentalists clearly exhibit this intelligence, so do the students who seem particularly attracted by the birds singing outside the classroom window or who constantly tap out intricate rhythms on the desk with their pencils. Yo Yo Ma, Ravi Shankar, and Leontyne Price are good examples of this intelligence.
- **Logical/mathematical intelligence** enables individuals to use and appreciate abstract relations. Scientists, mathematicians, and philosophers all rely on this intelligence. So do the students who are engrossed in sports statistics or who carefully analyze the components of problems (either personal or academic) before systematically testing solutions. Albert Einstein, Madame Curie, George Washington Carver, and Henri Poincaré are good examples of this intelligence.
- **Visual/spatial intelligence** makes it possible for people to perceive visual and spatial information, to interpret this information, and to recreate visual images from memory. Architects, sculptors, and engineers need a well-developed spatial capacity. The students who turn first to the graphs, charts, and pictures in their textbooks, who like to sketch a map or web of their ideas before writing a paper, and who fill the blank space around their notes with intricate patterns are also using their spatial intelligence. While it is usually tied to the visual modality, spatial intelligence can also be exercised to a high level by individuals who are visually impaired. Nikola Tesla, Frank Lloyd Wright, Maya Ying Lin, and Georgia O'Keefe are good examples of this intelligence.
- **Bodily/kinesthetic intelligence** allows individuals to use all or part of the body to create products or solve problems. Athletes, surgeons, dancers, choreographers, and craftspeople all use bodily/kinesthetic intelligence. This capacity is also evident in students who relish gym class and school dances, who prefer to make models rather than write reports, and who toss crumpled papers with frequency and accuracy into a wastebasket across the room. Michelle Kwan, Alvin Ailey, and Tiger Woods are good examples of this intelligence.
- **Interpersonal intelligence** enables individuals to recognize and make distinctions about others' feelings and intentions. Teachers, parents, politicians, psychologists,

and salespeople all rely on interpersonal intelligence. Students exhibit this intelligence when they thrive on small-group work, when they notice and react to the moods of friends and classmates, and when they tactfully convince the teacher of their need for extra time to complete a homework assignment. Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce, Fanny Lou Hamer, and Bill Cosby are good examples of this intelligence.

- **Intrapersonal intelligence** helps individuals to distinguish among their own feelings, to build accurate mental models of themselves, and to draw on these models to make decisions about their lives. Although it is difficult to assess who has this capacity and to what degree, evidence can be found in how students use the other intelligences – that is, how well they capitalize on their strengths, how cognizant they are of their weaknesses, and how thoughtful they are about the decisions and choices they make. Maya Angelou, Mary Oliver, and Carl Jung are good examples of this intelligence.
- **Naturalist intelligence** allows people to distinguish among, classify, and use features of the environment. Farmers, gardeners, botanists, geologists, florists, and archaeologists all exhibit this intelligence, as do students who can name and describe features of every make of car around them. Rachel Carson, Jacques Costeau, and Jane Goodall are good examples of this intelligence.

Handout #6: UU Principles

We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote:

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
- Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations;
- Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
- The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
- The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all; and
- Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

Handout #7: Creating Moments of Transcendence

(Quotation from Myers and Myers' book, also found in Welcoming Children, page 63.)

Often we want to “give the ocean” to young children when splashing in the “puddle” is enough. We fall into this trap by the ways we choose to share our adult faith with our youngest children. In our hurry to communicate our faith, we often assume that words are the most effective vehicle. Yet by using only words, we may fail to engage children in those common mud-puddle experiences where God is most visible, such as sitting on a loved person’s lap and hearing a story, helping to bake bread, sharing a doughnut, or going with someone for a walk. These are the simple ways by which adults nurture and tend to the religious experiences of children.

The institutional church, unfortunately, often overlooks such participatory experience and substitutes a canned curriculum for such common, ordinary happenings. “Canned curriculum” here means a printed, generic curriculum that assumes anyone can use it. The question then becomes, Who can “fill the slots” to “teach the curriculum”? Such an approach often avoids the necessity of providing ongoing relationships and does not promote experiential interaction on the basis of the adult’s familiarity with and understanding of a child’s world.

Barbara Kimes Myers and William R. Myers,
**Engaging in Transcendence: The Church's Ministry and Covenant
With Young Children**

Handout # 8: Descriptions of Children with Disability Labels and Their Experiences in Church

Print each of the following descriptions on separate pages.

Give one description to each participant. Depending on the number of participants, several will receive the same description.

A child who uses a wheelchair. [You have a spinal injury so that you have use of your arms with braces, but no use of your legs. Sometimes you involuntarily jerk forward. You like sports and reading poetry.]

The last church I attended did not have any ramps so I had to be carried everywhere. It was humiliating. After I was brought upstairs with my chair, I could not move around much because there was furniture everywhere. The teacher was nice and the kids were curious because I am different, which I do not mind. But they had this circle meditation and talk, and all the kids and the teacher sat on pillows on the floor and I sat in my chair and had to look down on everyone.

People have a tendency to think I am stupid just because I am in a wheelchair, so the teacher and kids talked to me as if I was three years old. Every time I jerked forward, everyone stopped and stared at me. I wish I had been made to feel more welcomed. I hope my experience in the new church is better.

A child with Down syndrome. [You have the obvious physical attributes of a Down syndrome child; what you know is that everyone looks at you funny if they do not know you. Sometimes you cannot follow what is going on, but if someone explains it to you, you feel more comfortable. You like caring for small children and singing.]

The last church I went to did not think I belonged with other kids my age, so they gave me a special tutor who invented activities for me. I missed being with the other kids. I know I look different and some kids think I am dumb and fat and they make fun of me, but still I'd rather be around other kids. Sometimes I am clumsy and too loud so the teacher and kids get upset, which is why they gave me my own special tutor. I hope in this new church I get to be with kids.

A child who has attention deficit disorder (ADD). [You have always had a lot of energy and can't stand to sit still. You like to talk about everything. You know adults think you are often disruptive and uncontrollable but you do not understand why everyone gets so upset. Kids think you are odd and are deliberately trying to be bad. You like to build things and climb trees.]

It was awful at the last church. I got kicked out of the program three times. They kept doing these boring discussion groups so I invented stuff to do to keep me busy, which is when I got into trouble. Some of the kids like doing things with me and then they got into trouble, too, and then they could not be friends with me anymore. I don't understand why this happens and it makes me so angry. No one understands. I don't think this new church will be any better. No one ever likes me.

A child with Asperger's syndrome (high functioning). [You know you are different but you do not know why. You do not understand people; they are alien objects. It makes you so uncomfortable to be touched. You focus on one thing at a time but not for long. You like consistency and get very confused when the rules or plans are changed. You like dinosaurs and know everything about the different species, when they lived, and what they ate. You wish they still lived so you could have one as a pet.]

Mommy and Daddy are making me go to another church. I would rather stay home and build dinosaurs or read books about dinosaurs. I do not understand why the other kids are not interested in dinosaurs like I am. The kids annoy me. Anyway, I would much rather play by myself. At the last church, they would not let me talk about dinosaurs and they wanted me to hold hands all the time. They were always changing what they were doing each Sunday and I got confused, so sometimes it was too much and I got angry and they made my parents come and get me. I like to do stuff, though. At this new church I hope I can bring my dinosaurs.

A child with a learning disability. [Sometimes you feel like you must be from another planet because when you talk, people look at you funny as if you are strange and not making any sense. You try so hard to understand but evidently you do not because you are always screwing up. You think you are creative and intelligent, but you have such difficulty reading the words and doing the math. But you can invent things in your head and you love to draw.]

I hate school; everyone there thinks I am dumb except for my tutor. I have all these special classes so the kids know I am stupid. In the regular classes I get so anxious I am going to screw up, I almost always have a stomach ache.

The last church we went to was not much better than school. They kept having the kids read these stories and everyone knew that the reason I never volunteered to read is because I do not read very well. The discussions were interesting, but whenever I was asked for my opinion I would get so scared that I could not say anything. I always had an answer afterwards, but then it was too late and they'd be talking about something else. I've got good ideas, so I hope at the new church I can share what is inside of me.

A child with obsessive-compulsive disorder. [You and your parents are just beginning to understand the extent of your difficulty. You know you are very odd but you cannot help doing certain things over and over again like counting every crack in the sidewalk, having to turn three circles every time you go through a door, and having to arrange food all in a line before you can eat it. You know no one else has to do these things but you have to in order to feel better.]

My last Sunday school teacher tried to stop me every time I walked into the room and turned three circles. It made me so anxious I would be in tears and I knew the kids were staring at me but I would have to go out and turn three circles and then come back in and try to turn three circles until she finally would give up in disgust. It would start all over again when we had snack and I would line up all the crackers in a row. She would try to joke me out of it but all it did was make the kids notice more what I was doing and tease me later. I hated being there.

My parents are taking me to a new church, but it will not be any better because I know I am odd. But I have to do these things; I have no choice. It will start when we arrive and my parents will be frustrated because I will have to count the cracks in the sidewalk leading to the church. At least I can do this without too many people noticing. Maybe there will be some kids I already know in this church who already know I am odd and will just ignore me.

A child who is blind. [You have never been able to see so you have learned about your world primarily through touch and hearing. You are very bright and independent and get around well with your cane. You do not understand why people keep calling you brave or courageous because being blind is normal to you; it's part of living. You do get upset when someone says your eyes look funny and talk loud to you as if you are deaf or tell you that you cannot do something because you're blind without even asking you what you think.]

The last church my parents took me to did not know what to do with me. They said that there was absolutely no way the teachers could accommodate me because I would not be able to do all the activities the other children were doing and I might fall and hurt myself. When my parents assured the minister that I could take care of myself and that I would let people know when I needed assistance, he reluctantly let me attend the Sunday school. Everyone treated me as if I walked on eggshells. The teacher introduced me as a very brave little boy. Then she gave the children something to read but did not offer to read it to me. So I asked the kid next to me to read it to me and he got into trouble for talking out loud when he was supposed to read quietly. The teacher just assumed I would not understand. Because they were discussing about being related to all living things, the teacher brought in a bunny that everyone was allowed to hold but me. The teacher said because I could not see, I would hurt the bunny. I tried to explain that I am very gentle because that's how I learn about my world, so she let me have the bunny but snatched it away immediately. I could tell she was nervous around me. I never want to go back to church.

Opening and Closing Words and Prayers

From the Hymnal, Singing the Living Tradition:

470 – Affirmation (An affirmation of life, hope, and renewal even from tragedy.)

614 – The Sacred Hoop (The Great Spirit shelters all children of one mother and one father.)

616 – For So the Children Come (“Each night a child is born is a holy night.”)

652 – The Great End in Religious Instruction (It is to awaken the soul and spiritual life.)

657 – It Matters What We Believe (Some beliefs are harmful and some beliefs free us and enrich us.)

664 – Give Us the Spirit of the Child (A child’s spirit brings us closer to the joy of living.)

715 – Your Children (Children are their own beings, they are not yours.)

From Other Sources:

I light this chalice as a symbol of the Divine Light within us, the Divine Light within our children, and as a symbol of the Divine Light beyond our own being.

or

I light this chalice for the living spirit within us, within our children, and the living spirit beyond our being. I ask that by however way we name the Divine: Mother/Father, God/Goddess, living presence, universe, divine spirit, or beloved that this spirit be with us as we explore our ministry to children with special needs labels.

Amen and Blessed Be.

Sally Patton

Dear Mother and Father God, we know that by welcoming atypical children into our faith communities, we are welcoming the Divine into our hearts. Blessings upon blessings upon blessings.

Sally Patton

Let us hold always, this picture of our child in her completeness, even—especially—in the face of those who see her as decomposed, a collection of deficits.

Barbara Gill, **Changed By a Child:
Companion Notes for Parents of a Child
With a Disability**

The child is life and miracle, beauty and mystery, fulfillment and promise. Save the child. Protect the child. Care for the child.

From a conference on “The World’s Religions for the World’s Children”

Barbara Kimes Myers and William R. Myers,

**Engaging in Transcendence: The Church's Ministry and
Covenant With Young Children**

Divine Mother and Father, we pray for our children labeled with a disability and for ourselves that we may connect beyond the labels and diagnoses to the perfect child within. Help us to see each child with your loving eyes so we may minister with compassion and creativity. Bless this work we do within your loving embrace. Blessed Be and Amen.

Sally Patton

Spirit of life, spirit that radiates from within and connects us with every living being, help us remember and honor the child that still exists within each of us. For in our love for that inner child we know the uniqueness and specialness of each child in our church community and for all children everywhere. Whether we are parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, or special friends – children are connected to our souls. Loving God that speaks to us from within, help us remember what it means to cherish all children, for when the child is safe everyone is safe. We joyfully build an intergenerational church community; one that hears what T.S Eliot calls the “hidden laughter of children in the foliage” and stops to listen to the wisdom of its elders. Let us continue this sacred work, for right now is the time.

Blessed Be and Amen.

Sally Patton

Divine Spirit, we are grateful for this opportunity to come together in such a beautiful, spiritually centering place to share our passions, our visions, and our learnings for children. We will do what we can do to make the world safe for our children. We commit ourselves to looking beyond the labels to see the Divine Spirit in every child, to see wholeness instead of brokenness. Through our ministry to children we will truly be lights in the lonely desert that enlightens many.

Amen and Blessed Be.

Sally Patton

Songs

How Could Anyone

How could anyone ever tell you
You were anything less than beautiful?
How could anyone ever tell you
You were less than whole?
How could anyone fail to notice
That your loving is a miracle?
How deeply you're connected to my soul?

**Words and music by Libby Roderick; song found on her CD, If You See a Dream
Also found in the UU hymnal, Singing the Journey**

See Me Beautiful

See me beautiful.
Look for the best in me.
It's what I really am and all I want to be.
It may take some time,
It may be hard to find,
But see me beautiful.

See me beautiful each and every day.
Could you take a chance?
Could you find a way
To see me shining through
In every thing I do,
And see me beautiful.

Words and music by Red Grammer from the CD, Teaching Peace

Namasté (I Honor Thee)

Chorus

I honor thee.

I honor thee.

Namasté, I honor thee.

Deep within, Peace resides.

Faith abounds and love abides.

The light shines bright to illumine

Love without, Love without.

Chorus

When you are where you need to be,

Within that space, I honor thee.

Seen through eyes, an illusion;

Seen through spirit,

We are one.

Chorus

Words and music by Cathy Bolton from the CD, Communion with God

We Are

Chorus

For each child that's born,
A morning star rises
And sings to the universe
Who we are.
(Repeat)

We are our grandmothers' prayers.
We are our grandfathers' dreaming.
We are the breath of the ancestors.
We are the spirit of God.

We are Mothers of courage
Fathers of time
Daughters of dust
The sons of great visions
Sisters of mercy
Brothers of Love
Lovers of life
Builders of nations
Seekers of truth
Keepers of faith
Makers of peace
Wisdom of ages

Chorus

**Words and music, Ysaye M. Barnwell, copyright 1993 Barnwell Notes (BMI)
From the song suite, Lessons; commissioned by Redwood Cultural Work's New
Spiritual Project; funded by Meet the Composer.**

Everything Possible

We have cleared off the table, the leftovers saved
Washed the dishes and put them away
I have told you a story and tucked you in tight
At the end of your knockabout day
As the moon sets its sails to carry you to sleep
Over the midnight sea
I will sing you a song no one sang to me
May it keep you good company

Chorus

You can be anybody you want to be
You can love whomever you will
You can travel any country where your heart leads
And know I will love you still
You can live by yourself,
You can gather friends around
You can choose one special one
And the only measure of your words and your deeds
Will be the love you leave behind when you're done.

There are girls who grow up strong and bold
There are boys quiet and kind
Some race on ahead, some follow behind
Some go in their own way and time
Some women love women, some men love men
Some raise children, some never do
You can dream all the day never reaching the end
Of everything possible for you

Don't be rattled by names, by taunts, by games
But seek out spirits true
If you give your friends the best part of yourself
They will give the same back to you.

Chorus

Words and music by Fred Small, found on the CD, No Limit

Additional Resources

Books and Other Media:

Armstrong, Thomas. **The Myth of the ADD Child: 50 Ways to Improve Your Child's Behavior and Attention Span Without Drugs, Labels, or Coercion.** Plume Press, 1997.

Brooks, Robert, and Goldstein, Sam. **Raising Resilient Children: Fostering Strength, Hope, and Optimism in Your Child.** McGraw-Hill, 2002.

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Homan, Father Daniel, and Pratt, Lonni Collins. **Radical Hospitality: Benedict's Way of Love.** Paraclete Press, 2011.

Kaufman, Barry Neil. **Power Dialogues: The Ultimate System for Personal Change.** Epic Century Publishers, 1999.

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Myers, Barbara Kimes, and Myers, William R. **Engaging in Transcendence: The Church's Ministry and Covenant With Young Children.** Pilgrim Press, 1992.

Patton, Sally. **Don't Fix Me, I'm Not Broken: Changing Our Minds About Ourselves and Our Children.** John Hunt Publishing, 2011.

Patton, Sally. **A Faith-Based Sexuality Education Guide for the Inclusion of Children and Youth with Special Needs.** www.embracechildspirit.org

Patton, Sally. **Welcoming Children with Special Needs: A Guidebook for Faith Communities.** Unitarian Universalist Association, 2004.

Ragged Edge Online Community, Mary Johnson, Editor. **Disability Awareness – Do It Right! Your All-In-One How-To Guide: Tips, Techniques & Handouts for a Successful Awareness Day.** The Advocado Press, 2006.

Websites:

Dr. Ross Green: www.livesinthbalance

Sally Patton: www.embracechildspirit.org