

DISABILITY DESCRIPTIONS

This material is from Sally Patton's book, *Welcoming Children with Special Needs*, published by the Unitarian Universalist Association.

Following are stories from children with conditions that may create challenges to participation in an organized program. The brief description of the child is followed by the child's story (in italics). You are the teacher for the group in which the child is or will be participating.

A child in a wheelchair. The Child with a spinal injury can use of the arms with braces, but has no use of the legs. Sometimes the Child involuntarily jerks forward. The Child likes sports and reading poetry.

The last church I went to did not have any ramps so I had to be carried everywhere. It was humiliating. After they brought my chair upstairs, I could not move around much because there was furniture everywhere. The teacher was nice and the kids were curious, but I don't mind that because I am different from them. But, they had this circle meditation and talk and all the kids and 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 wheel chair so the teacher and kids talked to me as if I were three years old. Every time I jerked forward, everyone would stop and stare at me. I wish there was a way for me to feel more welcome. I hope my experience in the new church is better.

A child with Down Syndrome. The Child has the visible physical attributes of a Down syndrome child and is aware of this. Sometimes the Child can't follow what is going on, but if someone explains it, the Child feels more comfortable. The Child likes caring for smaller 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 make fun of me, but still, I'd rather be around other kids. Sometimes I am clumsy and too loud and the teacher and kids get upset. That's why they put me with my own special tutor. I hope in this new church that I get to be with kids.

A child who has ADHD. The Child always has a lot of energy and can't stand to sit still. The Child likes to talk about everything. The Child knows adults think he/she is often disruptive and uncontrollable but the Child doesn't understand why everyone gets so upset. The Child feels that people think he/she is odd and, when things get out of hand, is deliberately trying to be bad. The Child likes 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-- that is when I got into trouble. Some of the kids like doing things with me and then they also got into trouble. Then they couldn't 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). The Child knows that she/he is different but not why. The Child does not understand people, and thinks of them as alien objects. It makes the Child so uncomfortable to be touched or when someone tries and make eye contact. The child focuses on one thing at a time but not for long. The Child likes dinosaurs and knows everything about when they lived, what they ate, what the different species are. The child wishes they still lived so she/he could have one as a pet.

Mommy and Daddy are making me go to another church. I would rather stay at home and build dinosaurs or read books about dinosaurs. I don't understand why the other kids aren't interested in dinosaurs like I am. The kids annoy me and I would much rather play by myself. At the last church, they wouldn't let me talk about dinosaurs and they wanted me to hold hands all the time. I like to do stuff, though. At this new church I hope I can bring my dinosaurs.

A child with a learning disability. Sometimes the Child feels as if he/she must be from another planet because when he/she talks, people look at him/her funny, as if he/she were strange and not making any sense. The Child tries so hard to understand but always seems to be screwing up. The child thinks he/she is creative and intelligent, but has such difficulty reading the words and doing the math. The Child can invent things in and loves 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 that I'm going to screw up, I almost always have a stomachache. The last church we went to wasn't 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 don't read very well. The discussions were interesting, but whenever they asked me for my opinion I would get so scared that I couldn't say anything. I always had an answer afterwards, but then it was too late. I know I have good ideas though, so, I hope I get to share what's inside of me at the new church.

How to rephrase behavior to make working with ADHD children easier and more productive for everyone.

This list is from Sally Patton and was presented at a Mass Bay RE Team presentation in 2003.

Hyperactive	energetic
Impulsive	spontaneous
A daydreamer	creative
Inattentive	global thinker with a wide focus
Unpredictable	flexible
Argumentative	independent
Stubborn	committed to a point of view
Irritable	sensitive
Aggressive	assertive
Attention deficit disorder	unique