

# Can I Come Too?



## Enfolding All Preschoolers Into Your Cubbies Club

The prayer of Awana® is that **all** children and youth will come to know, love, and serve the Lord Jesus Christ. We desire that **all** children come to know Jesus as their Savior. We desire that **all** children grow in their love for Him. We desire that **all** children serve Him faithfully. As Jesus commanded the disciples to “Let the children come to Me,” may we start with our church children’s ministries. Let’s invest in reaching them for eternity within the context of a safe, fun, comfortable environment while also supplying comfort to their parents.

Awana ministry is a good entry point for all children, including our children who have special needs. The church has volunteers, and with training a big impact can be made on all families

for God. “Unfortunately, while desiring to reach out, we also realize that a local Awana club cannot meet the needs of every individual child. Yet, hopefully, the club can still benefit the child as he or she feels the love of the leader and socially interacts with other clubbers. Churches will need to decide the scope of their ministry to children with special needs.”<sup>1</sup>

Let’s define special needs. “A special needs child is one who needs assistance in acquiring or processing information or a child who needs assistance beyond the usual interaction between leader and clubber.”<sup>2</sup> Special needs have been defined by what a child cannot do without help that a typical peer can do. It may be delays in reaching expected educational, physical or emotional milestones, or in doing activities. The range can be from mild learning disabilities to severe mental retardation, to physical disabilities, terminal illness, and/or food allergies, to name a few.

Let's get to know, love and serve all children, especially our extra-special preschoolers. They are special to us and even more so to Jesus! Let's get to know their diverse abilities, basic needs, and challenges so we can serve them better. Let's show them love through our godly attitude and actions. Finally, may we serve them through accommodating and modifying our activities to reach and include them as well as communicate and involve their parents. So what does it mean to enfold all preschoolers into your Awana ministry? Let's explore that together.

Ready. Get set! Know. Love. Serve.

### **I. Know — build a personal relationship with the child.**

There are already such diverse abilities among preschoolers as a group. They all need lots of practice and repetition. Although specific disabilities may be starting to show up during this age, there usually is not a striking difference unless it is a behavioral issue. Get to know each of your preschoolers as an individual. Who are they and what do they like to do? Encourage the child to move from "No, I can't" to "I will do my best."

Let's become familiar with the basics of working with our specially-designed preschoolers. According to the Center for Disease Control, one in six children will be born with a disability of some kind.<sup>3</sup> By arming yourself with information you can better minister to them and their families.

Getting to know the individual Cubbie will help you identify the area involved in their delays or weaknesses. Take this insight and institute things to strengthen their areas of weakness. Accommodate for these areas or modify activities to allow for greater success. As a leader, help the child to be as independent as possible. Let them try to accomplish whatever task they have been given on their own first. Step in to help before they get frustrated.

In getting to know the child you must also get to know the parent. Parents are the ones responsible for raising their child, and we are their partners!

Parents usually have a relentless commitment and dedication to their child. Draw them in so the child has the best environment for success. They can let you know if their child gets stressed in certain situations or conditions. One such example is how a child with autism may respond negatively to subtle sensory issues such as sights, sounds, lights, and smells. This will give you a heads up so you can be prepared with how to avoid it if possible or how to handle it if it arises.

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Listed below are some of the major areas where challenges may occur. Keep in mind that some preschoolers may have deficits in more than one area.

**Fine motor** covers movements involving the smaller muscles of the body like fingers, toes, wrists, hands, tongue and lips. Take this into account during table activities in Handbook Time and Snacks. Also, if you collect an offering, this can be a challenge for them. Consider using a bank to collect your offering (dues) and allow the child to practice holding the coins and placing them in the slot. This will help with strengthening their fine motor skills. If a child is unable to place the offering in the slot, allow another child or leader to do it for them. Thank them for bringing the offering. Keep in mind that improvements in fine motor skills often follow improvements in gross motor skills.

**Gross motor** is all about controlling the larger muscles of the body used for walking, running, sitting, crawling, and other physical movements. Balance, posture, body awareness in space, and left and right side awareness can be affected. Quite often their minds are alert and functioning properly while their bodies are uncooperative. Remember that proficiency in gross motor skills comes before fine motor skills proficiency. Play Time would show these delays or deficits. The resulting physical disabilities may prevent the child from participating in a typical way. Children with spina bifida, muscular dystrophy or cerebral palsy are examples. These children may have braces or even be in wheelchairs. Find safe and fun ways to include them whenever possible. Look at the game idea and see how it can be tailored to include a specific child with their individual physical disabilities. For example, in Bear Hug 9 of the *HoneyComb Teaching Plans*, when playing the game Pull the Weeds, pair up each child with another child to play. This will greatly help a child with gross motor deficits to play right along with his peers. Be aware of helping them find a suitable partner who will assist them. Games found in Bear Hug 12 of the *HoneyComb Teaching Plans* also are played in pairs. One is called Howdy, Partner while another is called Pair Play. Again pair up the child with gross motor deficits with a suitable partner who will help them to play the game.

**Speech and language** covers communication, which is a critical way we express ourselves. Therefore, this can become a source of frustration when a child cannot communicate his needs or wants. Pronunciation of words can be delayed or difficult if a speech impediment or hearing loss is present. Learn to watch the child's lips and ask the child to repeat her words if you did not understand them. Also, a lack of vocabulary can hinder a child from communicating his needs. Ask children to show you or take you to what they want. Try to make it your problem as much as possible. You could say, "I'm sorry, I didn't hear you. Please tell me again." Stuttering is often seen at this stage and most children outgrow it. Be calm and patient while you seek to understand them. It is up to us to slow down and listen.

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**Auditory challenges** can express themselves in different ways. Deaf children depend mostly on their eyes when learning, so be sure to include more visual experiences in your learning strategies. Those with limited hearing may face challenges from certain pitches in people's voices making the sound garbled or even painful. Being aware of this will help you as you communicate with the child. Also be aware that other children may have a right or left ear advantage. This would be important to know so that you are speaking to them on the correct side. An auditory delay or difficulty will affect all times of club meeting but especially Handbook Time.

**Visual impairment** covers visual disabilities that range from children who have 20/200 vision (legally blind) to those who can only distinguish light from darkness to those who are completely blind. It may also include those with visual perception issues such as lazy eye or depth perception deficits. Be available to help the child navigate the chosen activity.

**Intellectual disability**, like the other impairments discussed above, also has a wide range of severity levels. It can range from mild, where children are capable of learning, to profoundly impaired, where direct supervision is always needed. An example would be children with Down syndrome who range from mild challenges to severe disabilities. You would need to tailor your support depending on the level of impairment. As with all disabilities, communication with parents is critical.

**Sensory integration** problems result in delay or difficulty in responding to the overwhelming amount of sensory information that needs to be processed continually. It can also involve the interpretation of this information as well as the response, which can lead to chaos with daily activities becoming mountains to climb. An example of misinterpreting sensory information could result when a new child arrives at Cubbies® for the first time. Being led to a Coming In table activity could lead to overwhelming fear as he is met with many voices, faces and sudden movements by excited Cubbies, in addition to a strange new surrounding. So instead of being excited and wanting to join right in, the child hides, screams uncontrollably, and runs out of the room. The leader, in trying to help the child, reaches for him and adds touch to the overwhelming sensory information he is already trying to escape.

Daily activities such as brushing his teeth and hair followed by getting dressed can also be too much, too much touching due to overly sensitive skin. It is actually interpreted as pain in some overly sensitive children.

The entire club meeting could be a source of sensory overload so steps need to be taken to downscale the overload. The child may also exhibit unusual behaviors such as avoiding or seeking out touch, movement, sounds and sights. Usually when we think of sensory overload we think of children with autism or attention deficit disorder. These children experience sights, sounds, smells, colors and lights to an unusually intense degree. Simply put, it is overwhelming. Primary colors seem to soothe some children with these sensory disorders. You could also minimize the sensory overload by having the sensitive child in a smaller sized group and having him sit at the end of the table where it is less likely that he would be touched. Also check out the rooms you use. Can you lower the noise and lighting level? Can you lower the visual stimulation by limiting the use of hanging objects, colors and pictures on the walls?

Challenges come with the territory of welcoming specially-designed preschoolers, but keep in mind that any time a child is involved, challenges come

along! Examine your attitude — can you see challenges as opportunities for growth and even joy? One of the biggest overall challenges will be that each preschooler truly is unique. An identical diagnosis does not equate to identical needs or goals. Get to know each child as a unique creation of God. Typically their weaknesses are paralleled by amazing strengths — find them! Come up with a way to turn a challenge into a triumph. Accommodate and match their abilities to the task at hand, implementing strategies for success. Then stand back and watch God do His amazing work!

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Get into the habit of naming objects. For example, name body parts when playing games like Cubbie Says (a game similar to Simon Says). Name colors and shapes when coloring during Handbook Time. Name food items and talk about their color, shape and texture when eating the snack. In other words, be teaching all the time. Preschoolers love to know. Can't you just hear them saying, "I know my ABCs, want to hear them?" or "I know how to count, want to hear me?" Encourage this desire to know.

Word of warning: Be prepared to answer when asked why a child is getting extra help. Remember this rule of thumb: Do not do for a child what he can do for himself. Always encourage and expect great things. Be a ministry that teaches each child to do their best, which is different for each child.

One of the major areas you need to know about is discipline. This is one of the major ways children communicate their needs to us and you can learn a lot about a child by watching their behavior. Behavior is communication! When chatter is on the rise in the room, interpret what is happening

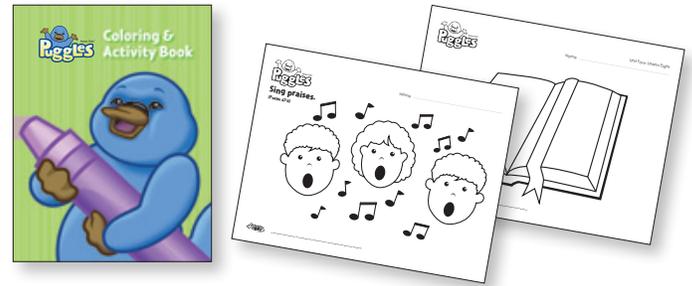
and stay on guard. Learn to identify possible drivers or triggers of behavior — good or bad. Be equipped to respond appropriately with congratulations for good behavior or correction for bad behavior.

Boundaries and clear expectations in regards to rules and behavior are key for safety and security. It is helpful to have clearly defined spaces for Lesson Time, such as using carpet squares or painter's tape lines or shapes. The child will sit on or behind the defined space. Also consider using placemats to define an individual's space during table times.

In addition, give structure, parameters and choices on how they can participate. For example, tell Cubbies to stand on this colored dot, square or letter during singing time or while waiting for a turn during Play Time. Teach them to stop, look and listen by using the Cubbie Bear Buddy Levels. The Cubbie Bear Buddy Levels use the familiar concept of traffic light colors to teach the behavior expectations. Connecting your discipline rules to something Cubbies are familiar with will help them to understand and therefore to obey. The use of a green traffic light poster (Level Three) means go and play. A yellow traffic light poster (Level Two) means caution, so Cubbies should be careful and courteous. A red traffic light (Level One) means stop moving and talking but not listening or looking. A red traffic light is used during Lesson Time when leaders want Cubbies to stop moving and talking but not listening or looking.

As a rule of thumb it is good to use various resources that target as many of their senses as possible. In addition to saying the rules, consider having fewer words and more visual cues. Look for downloadable pictures to supplement words in verses, rules and commands. For example, have an open Bible to show when it is Lesson Time, children singing when it is time to sing and children sharing when sharing is not being done. Look for pictures in the *Puggles® Coloring & Activity Book* as well as online sources to show the children what you desire. Picture cues also work great during transition times or activity change times. You can also use a signal such as tapping a drum, ringing

a bell, or playing some music. This helps give everyone a heads up for the change of activity.



Just as show and tell works great in teaching appropriate discipline and classroom expectations, it can be used in other ways as well. Imitation of peers has shown to be helpful in learning appropriate behavior. Use peers to help with verbal and physical prompts that reinforce rules such as a red traffic light for stop. Their peers show them the correct behavior while also telling them through words. For Lesson Time, you could show them a picture of a child sitting with their hands in their lap then tell them it is time to sit and place their hands in their lap. For preschoolers who are unsettled, consider allowing them to have a favorite toy or item with them to hold during this time.

Another way leaders could use show-and-tell is through establishing play themes and assigning roles such as acting out the biblical account of David and Goliath instead of just saying go play. Leaders can give suggestions or gestures that signal the correct way for a child to respond or initiate interaction with a peer or toy. Model or show how to use toys such as a car while also telling them this is how we play. It is not thrown or banged, it is pushed along the table or floor. Be direct and closely monitor the Cubbies during club activities.

“To know her is to take the time to understand her on her own terms, at her own pace, in her own words.”<sup>4</sup>

## **2. Love — based on unconditional, steadfast love.**

It all starts with your personal attitude as a leader. Let's start with an accepting attitude. Parents would love for you to include their

specially-designed preschoolers in your Puggles and Cubbies club ministries. Other preschoolers are very accepting of them and this interaction allows all to benefit and learn from each other. One example of this is learning better socialization skills.

“A national survey shows that 70% of early childhood programs include children with disabilities.”<sup>5</sup> “They are in our secular preschool programs, where are they in our church programs? Less than 0.1% of North American churches provide for deaf children and only 4% of deaf people attend church.”<sup>6</sup>

As a leader, your attitude should be contagious. It should arouse interest, excitement, a “want-to, can-do attitude.” It should say “You belong,” “I believe in you” and “We are so glad you are here. We desire you just like God desires us!” The severity of the disability coupled with a nurturing, accepting attitude will greatly influence how a child progresses. Keep in mind that you may need a lower child to leader ratio. You may even need one-on-one leader-child interaction in some instances.

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As a club and church your attitude speaks volumes as to whether you are welcoming. Enfold these dear children making them feel safe, wanted, and loved. Parents mourn over their child’s lost potential, worry about their future, and try to make it through today. Where better to receive

hope than from the God of all hope through His family? Let’s truly be His arms, feet, eyes, ears, and especially His heart! Are you willing to surround and sustain these families with a love incomprehensible? Be Jesus to them!

One way to help each child feel welcome is to consider having the specially-designed child visit club early, see the room(s), schedule, and so forth. Help them feel comfortable — both the child and parent. By loving the child you are loving the parent. Plan ahead to ward off problem times and places. One way to show this love is during Lesson Time. Consider doing a lesson on all the ways we get around — plane, train, car, bicycle, bus, walk, run, skip, etc. Explain that not all their friends may be able to walk to get around. They may need to use a wheelchair, crutches, braces, and so forth. In the same vein, share about the different parts of their body and what each does. Share that sometimes one part may not work very well, like an eye or ear. This would be a good lesson when talking about God creating humans.

Look next to your learning environment. “Children with disabilities almost by definition don’t learn naturally, even in an engaging environment. They don’t know what is important to pull from it,” says Sandall (University of Washington College of Education). “We have to ask what typically developing children are accomplishing, then find out how we can help the kids who aren’t able to do that automatically.” The key is to find ways to meet a child’s specialized needs without significantly altering the nature of daily instruction and activities.”<sup>7</sup> Therefore, be intentional and creative to include sensory based Total Time Teaching throughout club activities to enhance the learning. Make sure they are directed at the special needs of any of your preschoolers.

Providing this support along with effective tools helps improve learning and increase success and fun. Use child-focused instructional strategies, or in other words, have a game plan, keeping in mind most children will be able to do what other children do just by adapting it to their abilities.

### 3. Serve — make child's needs a priority.

The goal is to give practical, easy to implement, and low cost ideas for activities throughout the club meeting to help accommodate for preschoolers with special needs. Use the learning style they thrive in to teach them, then watch them flourish. When working with preschoolers, practice and perseverance are keys to success.

Use multisensory learning strategies throughout your club meeting. Cubbies lessons naturally lend themselves to using all the senses to maximize learning. Strategies shared will help all preschoolers but are particularly important for our specially-designed little ones. See ideas throughout your teaching plans as well as on the resource CD and *Awana for Me* for helpful information.

Use the learning style they thrive in to teach them, then watch them flourish. When working with preschoolers, practice and perseverance are keys to success.

Ask yourself, "How can I make this work for this individual child?" Your answer will lead you to what to do. Here are some ideas to start your thinking.

#### COMING IN, HANDBOOK TIME AND GOING HOME

These times are probably where the most modification will be needed. Set your expectations high, focusing on what the child can do. Stand back and be amazed at what they accomplish.

While working on their craft or activity page, difficulties with fine motor skills could impact their ability to successfully complete the activity. Be alert to problems with their fingers, wrists or hands. Be patient and give lots of practice, repetition and

encouragement. Play-Doh® and lacing activities are common ones we do to help develop fine motor skills. Below are some additional ones to try.

- Children may not be able to hold crayons or markers. Consider wrapping a foam layer around the crayon or marker. This will allow the child to grasp the crayon better. You can also use practice golf balls — the ones that are plastic and have holes. Place the drawing instrument all the way through two holes in the ball. This allows the child to grasp the ball to color or draw or write.
- Give them activities like tearing or cutting paper, introducing different textures, thicknesses and colors of paper. They can then glue their torn/cut paper to a coloring or activity sheet. This may be easier than holding a crayon and coloring.
- Draw thick black lines around various shapes to cut out. Allow the child to tear along the dark black lines. Then the child can glue the shapes to another piece of paper to make or fill in a coloring page.
- While the child is waiting for a turn to recite the verse, allow him or her to play a matching game. Collect various sizes and colors of plastic lids and containers. Encourage the child to match the lids by color or size; they also could try to put them on the correct container. If desired, put pictures or stickers that relate to the lesson on the containers. Also consider having inexpensive Magna Doodles®, DoodlePro A®, Aqua Doodle classic mat or Etch A Sketch® for them to play with while waiting. These drawing toys are based on different technologies and surfaces but all are centered around drawing, scribbling, and writing.
- Consider using clothespins that pinch open to add to a paper plate mask. It would be good to do when learning about God creating animals or man. The clothespins can become the hair, the mane, or whatever the child desires. They can also just become practice in taking them off and on the paper plate.

- Use a foam pegboard with plastic stackers. You could also have stacking cups available for them to stack. These are great ideas which are developmentally appropriate and fun to help a child with gross and fine motor skills. The child practices putting the plastic stackers into the holes of the pegboard while saying their verse or waiting for their turn. They can be purchased at teaching stores or online.
- Write a number from one to five on various index cards in large, bold print. Have various items in a box. Allow the child to count out the correct number of items and place them on the corresponding index card. For example, in a lesson on God made water animals, include a series of play plastic frogs, fish and turtles. The child would pick the correct number of the animal and place the animals on the corresponding index card.
- When you do any lessons involving water (creation of water animals, Noah and the ark, Jesus and the disciples on the Sea of Galilee, etc.), consider bringing in a variety of sponges and a small tub. Fill the tub partially with water and allow the children to soak up and squeeze out the water from the sponges. The sponge will fill up depending on the amount of water you place in the tub, so do not use a lot. You may also bring in small spray bottles that they can use to mist water onto paper.
- Allow a child to use gestures, sign language, a picture board, book, or any appropriate electronic technology to say the verse if needed.
- Use hand-over-hand method (where leader places their hand on a child's hand to guide them through a task) rather than doing a task for them.
- Make a touch and feel box. Place items of various sizes, textures and shapes inside that have to do with the unit, lesson or verse. Allow each child to put his or her hand into the box hole to feel the items inside. Let children guess what they are feeling.
- Consider painting with different kinds of brushes and objects. Some objects are vegetables, fruits, and kitchen utensils. You could also paint with plastic animals when learning about God creating the animals. What fun to make animal footprints on paper. Try to choose an object that goes with the lesson. Also paint with things other than paint, such as pudding.



- Use textured glue or paint. This is good for the visually impaired because they can feel the contours of the raised paint or glue when it dries.
- Do a self-contained sensory scavenger hunt. Hide objects related to the lesson in a tub of colored plastic balls or small ball pit. Choose objects that are age-appropriate and safe. Consider having a picture card with each hidden object on it. Set picture cards near the tub. A child can choose a card and then look for the object in the tub or find an object in the tub and then find the matching card.
- Have a wide variety of toys for dramatic play like dolls, a playhouse, kitchen setting with toy food and utensils and large motor equipment like boxes and tunnels. Set up learning centers or stations for each unit.

### **Ideas to help those who have visual impairment:**

- Make sure the child understands what is happening. You could have a student leader or an older Cubbie be his partner throughout the club meeting or allow the child to sit by a leader.
- Use textured shapes to represent words in the verse. Allow the child to feel the word shapes.
- Outline paper objects to color with colored glue which when dry is raised above the paper. Regular uncolored glue dries colorless so it will not be as useful for the visually impaired. This ridge will allow the child to color within the object by feeling the edges to stay inside. Puffy paint could also be used.
- The use of certain colors and materials helps some children to see better. Use those whenever possible. Colored overlays seem to really help some children. Allow the child to choose the color that best suits them. Most children seem to gravitate toward blue, yellow and red. The colored overlays come in a set of 10 and can be ordered online or found at teaching stores.



- Use the *HoneyComb Handbook Music CD* so they can learn the verse through song.

### **Ideas to help with speech and language delays**

- Go over the verse slowly and distinctly several times. Lean in and listen intently when the child recites the verse. Give your undivided attention.
- Play a memory game using picture cards that relate to the verse or lesson. Place the cards face up at first, allowing children to choose a picture card and then find the match. Encourage them to name the picture or why they chose it. Practice the verse.
- A nonverbal child could work alongside an assigned peer buddy.
- Use sign language or made-up hand motions to teach the verse to all the children. Allow them to use the signs or motions when reciting the verse.
- Music helps memory so use it to your advantage. Teach the preschoolers to hear the words — say the words — do the words — learn the words. In other words, they memorize the verse and understand the meaning of it so it is internalized, impacting their behavior. Play the *Cubbies HoneyComb Handbook Music CD* in the background throughout the club meeting. Some may sing along without realizing they are saying the verse or it just might remind them of the verse so they can say it to you.



- Use picture symbols in place of words or alongside words. Go over new words slowly and distinctly, especially if you have hearing or speech impaired preschoolers.
- Say the verse to song or rhythm, or allow Cubbies to echo you. Vary the volume as you say the verse. For example, say the verse soft then loud or loud then soft. You could also say the verse in different tones of voice.
- Attach symbols or pictures to go with the words in the verse to blocks and let the child put the blocks in order. This is especially good if the child is nonverbal or has a speech impediment.
- Incorporate a recordable voice box (available online from BIGmack Switch or BIGmack communicator) inside the stuffed Cubbie Bear's vest. The verse is recorded and the child pushes on the button to say the verse. This is good for a child with multiple severe disabilities. Another example of technology being used to help is an iPad™ with digital verse/symbol pictures to put into sequence or touched in order. There are picture exchange communication software programs online that could change words of the verse into pictures or symbols.
- The Three-Hop method of reviewing/repeating, reciting, and reinforcing' is helpful for all children. The Handbook Leader Sheets for each Bear Hug are written to follow this method.
- Preschoolers like puzzles, sequencing, and matching, so use any of these methods to help Cubbies learn the verse words and meaning. For example, Cubbies could add pieces to a puzzle as the verse is repeated or recited. You could also provide an assortment of felt pieces, blocks or links that they could play or build with while repeating or reciting the verse.
- Many verse apps for iPads and iPhones® are available. See [ChristianiPhone.com](http://ChristianiPhone.com) for ideas.\*

**LESSON TIME**

Sensory integration issues may cause a child to avoid Lesson Time. In most clubs, children sit together on the floor in front of the leader. Some children with sensory issues are afraid someone might touch them. From past negative experiences, they expect the touch will hurt so they avoid times where they could be touched, whether during Lesson Time or other times during the club meeting.

\* References to websites and resources not created by Awana are for your information and are not necessarily an endorsement of content.

- Allow them to participate in a way that appeals to them, such as waving a piece of ribbon to the music or running it through their hands during Lesson Time
- Music encourages coordinated movement, which helps strengthen those who are weak in this area. Use simple lyrics and familiar tunes. Consider doing songs with motions to help those with gross motor deficits. See your teaching plans for song ideas and motions.
- Allow an object to be held by a child who has sensory or attention issues. This will help keep them engaged while lessening the effect of distractions.
- Designate a space and encourage these children to be in the room even if they are not sitting with the group.
- Define “their” space with painter’s tape or carpet squares. This is especially helpful for those who need visual assistance and/or those who have trouble with body awareness.
- Explore various interactive Bible apps for the iPad. One example is The Beginners Bible app for iPad put out by Zondervan®. It can be purchased through iTunes®. The children can touch the water and hear and see it splash on the shore, can add colors to the rainbow, and so forth. If your group is small enough, you may allow each child to touch the screen and interact with the lesson. If your group is too large, consider having this available during Handbook Time. After the child completes their verse they may have a turn.
- Use repetition in your teaching. The teaching plans already include Total Time Teaching, which builds in repetition of the main lesson themes in each segment of club.
- Use a child’s sense of touch (tactile) and movement (kinesthetic). Use 3D manipulatives as much as possible. Make your commands interactive; tell Cubbies to point to something with you or tell them to say it with you.

## PLAY TIME

- Beanbags are great for throwing and catching. They are especially good for children who cannot run or walk but are confined to a wheelchair.



- Practice the verse using a musical chair game. When the last word of the verse is said, all need to sit. The child without a chair leads others in saying the verse. If a child is unable to play due to physical limitations like being in a wheelchair, consider allowing them to hold the CD player in their lap. They would then push the button and yell “Go” for each round of the game.
- Allow a child to catch and throw balls from his or her wheelchair.
- When teaching about the Israelites crossing the Red Sea, you could place a red masking tape line across the middle of the room. The children could practice their balance by walking on the line from end to end. They could also jump in a zigzag pattern all the way from end to end. Balance is a key preschool motor skill that they are mastering. It would be beneficial to help those still developing in this area. Any child with moderate to severe balance problems would love to have a leader help them with this activity.
- Act out certain animals — their movements and sounds — when Cubbies are learning about creation. For example, slither like a snake, hop like a rabbit, jump like a kangaroo, gallop like a horse or swim like a fish across the game floor.

For children with special needs it is very helpful to do something concrete as it helps them in their processing and understanding. By adding sound and movement along with the words it will improve their processing. Adding a picture of the animal would help even more.

- Obstacle courses are suggested in some of the Cubbies lessons and these help strengthen large (gross) muscles.
- Maybe use scooter boards on occasion, which allow a child with spina bifida to participate in a way they normally could not. Let a child lie on the board on his stomach and propel himself across the room with his arms. All children enjoy this but children with spina bifida have strong arms and love joining in the fun! Be diligent and intentional, focusing on safety in your use of them. Only have a couple of children go at a time.
- Build a mountain out of various size pillows and cover it with sheets. Allow children to climb up and over the mountain. This also helps develop balance.
- Play Cubbie Says (which is like Simon Says, but the Cubbie Bear puppet is used as Simon). Cubbies use their sense of touch and learn to listen to directions.

### SNACK TIME

- Use straws in drinks to help strengthen jaw muscles, which contribute to better articulation.
- Be aware of any food allergies.
- Be aware of any child who may have choking problems. Make sure the snacks are age appropriate. Snack time could pose a problem if a child's, lips or swallowing is affected. Be diligent during this time and versed in what to do if a problem arises.
- Define each child's space using placemats. This helps to give children a visual border of what is theirs.

Do you need to make some curriculum modifications to allow every child to participate and if so, what? Remember there is now a shorter and longer version of the verse. Allow the parent to choose which one the child will do. It is important for the parent to see their child making progress. Discuss with the parents the best ways to support their child. Be proactive, remembering parents are the expert on their child. Engage them early and often, building a relationship with them. Know the areas where their child will need extra help and support. Adjust (adapt) to the needs of the individual family and child. Serve the child and serve the family. If the child has physical challenges, develop a plan, be trained and follow it. Walk through the plan with the parent to make sure it is OK to use it.

Keep in mind that a preschooler with special needs is still only a child and wants to do the things that all the children are doing. Do you see the disability or the child? Let's refocus our vision on the child. Learn to focus on what the child can do, not on what he cannot do. Remember to stay focused on God's sovereign will and all-sufficient grace rather than on the child's limitations. Put forth the effort to do something special for them.

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One Cubbies club shared this story. One night at Cubbies, a mother of a preschooler with special needs had had a difficult day with her preschooler. She had sent him to his room for misbehavior. The entire way to his room he was saying "There is none that doeth good, NO-NO-NO- not one" (Romans 3:12b). You may not realize the work that God is doing through His Word. Don't set limits on God's ability. He uses limitations in ways that are limitless. Be faithful to teach His Word; it truly impacts lives.



Let's get to know, love and serve these extra-special preschoolers God sends our way so that one day they can know, love and serve our Lord Jesus Christ! Wouldn't it be great to hear of Cubbies who grew up to know Jesus personally, love Him intimately, and serve Him passionately? May we continue on till He returns!

## Endnotes

1. *Awana for Me*. Awana® Clubs International, 2008, p. 5.
2. Ibid.
3. Tutterow, Mary. "A Place to Call Home," *K! Magazine*, January/February 2012, p. 100.
4. Bonker, Elizabeth M. and Virginia G. Breen. *I Am in Here*, Revell, 2011.
5. College of Education, University of Washington, *Lessons Within Lessons*, 2011, Web article.
6. Houser, Tina. "Jesus Knows Sign Language," *K! Magazine*, September/October 2011, p. 34.
7. College of Education, University of Washington, *Lessons Within Lessons*, 2011, Web article.

## General Resource List:

The Special Needs Child, [the-special-needs-child.com](http://the-special-needs-child.com)

[awana.org/clubclinic](http://awana.org/clubclinic) Barbara Newman segments

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