

Guidelines for Clergy and Religious Educators for Conversations with Parents

- 1. Present an overall attitude of openness and a desire to be supportive**
- 2. Ask the parent(s) what they are hoping for**
 - Specifically, are they hoping for inclusion in a 'mainstream' religious education group with his/her peers? Potential possibilities re inclusion with the appropriate supports, within a group for children with special needs, one-on-one religious education or some combination.
- 3. What are his/her special interests?**
- 4. What are his/her special gifts?**
- 5. Let the parent(s) know that in order to provide as positive an experience as possible, certain information will be helpful.**
 - How would they describe his/her social relationships?
 - What methods of communication are used?
 - What have been effective learning strategies
 - Are there any aggressive or inappropriate behaviors?
 - What are the possible triggers of inappropriate behaviors?
 - What is helpful for holding his/her attention?
 - Are they willing to share a copy of his/her IEP, or at least what the requirements of it are?
 - It is important to recognize and respect the confidential nature of such a document
 - Again, let them know that the reason for requesting it is to improve the quality of the experience for their child.
 - Does she/he have any dietary or environmental issues?
 - Does she/he have any medical issues you need to be aware of?

As you do with any new family, it is good to get a sense of the role that faith plays in their life.

- Also remember that if they have not been able to attend worship regularly, it may be because they are very de-energized from dealing with disability in their family. A welcoming community can go a long way to helping them participate more.

Source: *Autism and Faith: A Journey into Community* manual by Elizabeth M. Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities at UMDNJ-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, Department of Pediatrics and the New Jersey Center for Outreach and Services for the Autism Community and The Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation.