

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? Inclusion with the appropriate supports, within a group for children with special needs, one-on-one religious education or a 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.