



Baptist Churches
of NSW & ACT



Setting up a Buddy Program for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Goals of the Buddy Program

Some churches have established a “Buddy Program” to support kids with ASD. The program has two main aims:

1. To provide support to a child without requiring their parents to assist; and
2. To enable a child to remain with their age group peers in their respective kids’ ministry program.

1 Appoint a Buddy Coordinator

The first step is to appoint a Buddy Coordinator – someone from your church who is willing to run the program. Occupational therapists, school teachers or speech pathologists may be particularly suited to this role. Most importantly, the Buddy Coordinator should be someone with a God-given gift and passion for these kids.

2 Recruit volunteers to be “Buddies”

The Buddy Coordinator is responsible for recruiting volunteers for the program. They may like to consider:

- Hosting an information lunch for any interested church members to attend, so that prospective volunteers can learn more about what is involved in the Buddy Program.
- Offering prospective volunteers the opportunity to serve on a once-off basis to see if they are willing to commit to the program.

There are no specific prior skill requirements for buddy volunteers, just a love of God and his church family. Qualities such as patience, kindness, tolerance, flexibility and understanding will greatly assist volunteers in their supporting role.

Volunteers could be any church attendees who are willing to commit to attending the kids ministry program one or more weeks each term. On the weeks they are not rostered, volunteers can attend the Sunday morning services. Although volunteers do not serve every week, they do need to be willing to build relationships over time with the children they are supporting.

3 Prepare volunteers

By law, all volunteers must complete a Working With Children Check. They also need to complete any other legislative or church requirements (for example, the Creating Safe Spaces course).

You may also require that volunteers attending training to develop skills in supporting kids with ASD. This can be provided from within the church, or (depending on funding available) be sourced externally. Volunteers need to be willing to work in collaboration with other volunteers and kids' ministry leaders.

4 Prepare resources

Certain items can be helpful to purchase in order to resource the Buddy Program. A list of suggested items can be found in the document "Ministering to Children with ASD".

5 Meet with the parents

Once volunteers have been recruited and trained, parents can register their children for the program. A suggested registration form can be found at the back of this document. Parents are asked about their child's special needs, interests, and best management strategies. This is important, because each child with ASD is different, and the parents know their child best.

Once the form has been collected, the Buddy Coordinator can make a time to meet with the parents to go through the registration form, collect any additional information, and explain the program.

6 Match buddies with children

The Buddy Coordinator is then equipped to match children with buddies who would connect well with them. Volunteers do not necessarily serve every week, but it's important that they are assisting the same child or children each time they are rostered in Kids' Church. Depending on the needs of the children, the ratio is generally one buddy to either one or two kids.

The Buddy Coordinator meets with each buddy to discuss how to support each individual child. It might be helpful for new Buddies to shadow more experienced buddies to see if they are a good fit/match with the child.

It is important that each week, the initial connection between buddies and children is a positive experience. Many churches begin with children sitting with their parents in church. Where this is the case, the following tips may be helpful:

- The parents and child are provided with a photo of the buddy at the time when children leave the service
- Parents take the child to meet the buddy at an agreed location
- The Buddy provides the child with a picture of Kids' Church
- The Buddy takes the child to the Kids' Ministry program, and the Buddy program commences.

7 Support the program

The Buddy Coordinator provides a thorough induction for new volunteers to the Buddy Program, and is a constant support to Buddies, helping address any problems as they arise.

It is important to remember that there may be times when a child needs to be withdrawn from Kids' Ministry, particularly if they are distressed or overly disruptive to the group. On these occasions, the child can be taken to a less stimulating environment where they will have the chance to settle (for example, a "calm corner"). Alternatively, you might like to provide an alternate activity (e.g. an iPad with a bible based program) for the child to do with their buddy.

If the child is significantly distressed, or if information or direction is needed, then the child's parents may at times need to be called upon.

The Buddy Coordinator should also keep the vision of the Buddy Program in front of the whole church. By communicating what is taking place, the church can stay informed, and foster interest in being part of the program.

Your Church
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Personal Profile of Child Buddy Program

CHILD'S NAME

STRENGTHS

A.

B.

SPECIAL INTERESTS

A.

B.

CHALLENGES

A.

B.

THINGS THAT MAY TRIGGER A MELTDOWN

A.

B.

BEHAVIOURS EXHIBITED BEFORE A MELTDOWN

A.

B.

BEST WAY TO APPROACH A CHILD WHEN MELTDOWN OCCURS

A. _____

B. _____

IMPORTANT SENSORY NOTES (E.G. HIGHLY SENSITIVE TO LIGHT, TOUCH, NOISE, ETC)

A. _____

B. _____

PREFERRED MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

A. _____

B. _____

AGREED EXPECTATIONS BETWEEN PARENT AND BUDDY PROGRAM

ANY ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

