LEADERSHIP COURSE

Jesus and the INCLUSION MODEL

Practical suggestions for the inclusion of all children and teenagers in the church

MODULE 3

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

We are starting the third module of the Children's Ministries Leadership Course, bringing incredibly rich themes for us to learn and deepen our knowledge about inclusion in our work with children in the church and the community. Particularly, this module is dedicated to how to support children with ADHD, autism in its various degrees, and intellectual disabilities.

In the reality of many churches, cases of children with some of these conditions are quite common. Therefore, it is necessary to be equipped to know how to include them and make them feel part of the church community.

The daily experience, unconditional support from family members, and, most importantly, individual cognitive abilities make each child unique in terms of learning.

In addition to cognitive ability and learning opportunities (teaching methods, learning through observation, and the example of the people we interact with), individual motivation has a high potential to influence each person's way of learning.

A learning disorder can be specific, causing an individual to struggle

with particular aspects of their functioning. Thus, recognizing small achievements and rewarding them is essential for the person to keep making efforts.

Therefore, providing each child/adolescent with a more suitable individual strategy for their particular way of learning may require more effort, but it is worth it for everyone. In this document, we will address the specific characteristics of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and provide practical insights that can assist teachers, Children's Ministries leaders, and families.

As Christian educators, it is necessary to stay updated on studies related to this topic so that in the Sabbath School and regular church services, children and adolescents with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), Intellectual Disabilities, or ADHD can develop their spirituality, access biblical learning, and experience different aspects that the Sabbath School program can provide.

While the reference framework applied in the Sabbath School programming might be effective, it is of fundamental importance to highlight the role of the family and their involvement in church activities.

The child's first school is the family, as God entrusted parents with teaching the first lessons of love and security. It is also at home that the child develops the concept of God's love, reverence, and obedience. The Children's Ministries needs to work in partnership with parents since they possess a wealth of information about the child. Dialogue and interaction with parents can facilitate the child's adaptation within the Sabbath School unit.

Parents are the ones who know what the child likes, so they are the most suitable individuals to pinpoint what upsets them and triggers crises. An interesting suggestion is to have an anamnesis form. This pre-information will help teachers outline some of the reinforcers described in this guide.

The interaction between Sabbath School teachers and families promotes the child's learning development. Building a collaborative dialogue and emotional connections is important, as it is through parents and Sabbath School teachers that the child will understand the love of God.

1. AN INVITATION TO STUDY

Autism is a term used for individuals who exhibit certain types of behavioral and developmental deficits and excesses. In reality, "autism" is an observational diagnosis given a set of behaviors. More recently, the term "autism spectrum disorder" has been used.

To assist children and adolescents in learning and progressing, we need to address some of the specific challenges they present (National Institute of Mental Health, 2006), such as:

COMMUNICATION
They may have limited or no expressive (spoken) or receptive (understanding) language, echo words or phrases, or have a unique way of speaking (fixated on a subject or different tone/volume of voice).

SOCIAL SKILLS
They may completely avoid social contact or be awkward or insecure in interacting with others.

PLAY SKILLS

Left to themselves, they might not explore or play with toys in the same way a typically developing child would, or they could become fixated on a particular toy or object (repeating the same thing over and over).

VISUAL AND AUDITORY PROCESSING

These senses may be less responsive, with minimal or no response to visual or auditory cues, or they may be hypersensitive to various sounds and visual stimuli, which can be highly distressing for them. Therefore, they may require a very gradual adaptation to typical learning environments as their tolerance increases. Sometimes, it is initially necessary to work in a highly controlled environment with minimal visual and auditory stimuli.

SELF-STIMULATION

They exhibit self-stimulatory behaviors, which can be comforting and predictable for them. The behavior can involve the whole body (rocking, hand-flapping, spinning, etc.) or the unconventional or inappropriate use of toys. They may also have obsessions, such as needing people and objects to always be in the same place or events to follow a predictable pattern.

UNUSUAL REINFORCERS

Effective reinforcers for typically developing children, like praise and approval, may not work for children with autism. They might require very personalized reinforcers that educators need to work with to motivate the child or adolescent to learn.

Due to being on the autism spectrum, not all characteristics are observable in all individuals. Teachers and leaders need to understand that these characteristics can vary and have different levels of intensity. It is important to avoid common stereotypes and opinions about people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), such as labeling them as individuals who "do not interact with anyone" or "live in their own world." Such labels can alienate them from the possibilities of active learning that the Children's Sabbath Curriculum offers.

2. OPEN DIALOGUE

Several topics about autism spectrum disorder (ASD) have been selected and will be presented below.

2.1 DIFFICULTY IN LEARNING BY OBSERVING OTHERS

Children and adolescents with autism may not learn by observing peers, parents, siblings, and teachers in the same way that typical children do.

Children and adolescents within the autism spectrum typically struggle to learn during everyday activities and situations. This means that each skill or behavior should be specifically addressed and systematically taught.

Therefore, delve deeper into the children and adolescents under your care and read articles about educating children with autism to stay updated on the latest information. Remember that children and adolescents with autism benefit more from specific strategies. This includes being attentive, welcoming, and patient; having positive expectations for learning; assisting with social and communication skills, as

well as academic abilities, and encouraging these individuals to reach their full potential.

Help children and adolescents understand and accept individuals with autism spectrum disorder. Provide information about children and adolescents with autism and create opportunities for positive interactions.

Approach parents to maintain effective communication with them. Tell them how important they are for helping you and other educators understand their child. Treat each encounter with parents as an opportunity to learn more about autistic children and adolescents.

Consider parents as equal partners, both yours and those of other professionals. Encourage them to ask questions and express emotions. If you do not know the answer to a question, let them know that you will seek information on the subject.

Discuss with parents how the media can inaccurately portray individuals with autism. Popular magazines, newspapers, movies, television, and the internet sometimes provide inaccurate information on the subject. Alert parents to this and let them know that they are always welcome to discuss anything they have read or heard about autism with you or another community professional.

Considering all or some of the difficulties presented, it is possible to understand how challenging it can be for an autistic child/adolescent to pay attention and learn. In general, children/adolescents with autism benefit from a well-structured environment, individualized instructions, and small group settings. (PUESCHEL; OTHERS, 1995)

Things to remember when helping someone with ASD:

• Learn as much as you can about ASD;
• Be clear and consistent;
• Keep instructions short;
• Use visual cues.

2.2 ABOUT EYE CONTACT

It is neither necessary nor advisable to start activities with the command "LOOK AT ME" or even keep calling the child's name before giving instructions. There is some very interesting work on Relationship Skills for children with autism. These studies have shown that asking a child to establish eye contact or look at your face might make you feel better, as they would be behaving like a typical child, but it does not help the child with ASD. According to the studies, making a child with autism look at you is like having a child with dyslexia hold a book and pretend to read - it might be the "right" way to behave, but they are not getting any information.

In general, you can gently request eye contact. Teach, do not force, and do it subtly, without pressure; the child might start with imitation and then learn the importance of this social behavior.

2.3 THE DETAILED AND STRUCTURED ROUTINE

Use visuals to show the structure of the day or activity period: make sure to have a visual for each activity (even the simplest ones, like washing hands, picking up a book, etc.); this way, the child/adolescent will be able to understand what is happening during that activity period.

ROUTINE

Some children with ASD prefer a well-structured routine, so when there is a change, they might get frustrated and overwhelmed. Therefore, try to maintain a routine in the environment; however, if you know that a change will occur, prepare the child/adolescent in advance (give them plenty of notice so they can get accustomed to the new idea).

VISUAL STIMULI

Most children with ASD learn better through visual stimuli, so it is important to use them. For instance, pictures on boards in the environment can help the child know where to put their backpack, photos of children sitting in a circle near the teacher will help them understand what to do. Create a board with pictures representing the classroom rules; this will assist the child/adolescent in following them. Visual cues are very important tools for the environment.

SIMPLIFY

When giving instructions, make sure to be very simple, use concrete language, and refer to visuals to provide a visual model of what you are saying.

DO NOT GIVE TOO MANY INSTRUCTIONS AT ONCE

For more complex instructions, break them down into parts, offering the child a well-structured step-by-step of what they should do.

AVOID DISTRACTIONS

Whenever possible, minimize distractions. If the environment is too noisy, too hot or cold, or too brightly lit, it can become even harder for the child/adolescent to focus and feel comfortable.

TRAINING/TECHNICAL AID

During playtime, try teaching how to invite another child to play, the way to share and borrow things, and how to be more flexible about where and when to play and take turns.

IN PRACTICE
ROUTINE

Incorporate the observations mentioned earlier into the established routine of the Sabbath School Curriculum for children. For example: visual cues; use pictures or posters with drawings indicating actions. The drawings should clear-

ly represent the action without too many colors or details, as they could distract the child. Music; select short songs for each moment. Music can aid in transitioning between activities and understanding the routine.

The curriculum is designed to cater to different learning styles. Considering individual differences and learners' characteristics, the following moments can be suggested for each Sabbath School session:

1. Welcome!
2. Preparatory Activities. Appealing to creative or imaginative learners.
3. Prayer and Praise.
4. Bible Lesson: Experiencing the Story and Bible Study. Catering to analytical learners.
5. Application of the Lesson. Catering to pragmatic learners.
6. Sharing the Lesson. Catering to dynamic learners.
7. Closing.
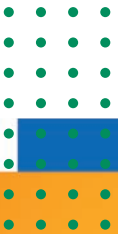
3. MAKE THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT REINFORCING

Before attempting to teach anything to the child/adolescent, spend time with them and pairing reinforcers.

Pairing simply means joining in pairs; matching; combining; likening; uniting.

The objective of pairing is to associate and replicate a pattern, for example: the child/adolescent views a model and, with figures and objects, identical or not, reproduces it. Therefore, if they love watching videos, be the person who makes the videos happen; if they enjoy active play, be the one to make the playtime happen. Pairing will serve as a support agent for the inclusion of children/adolescents with ASD in environments, with the goal of recognizing their interests and creating connections.

Establish an "enticement" for the child/adolescent, so that when they enter the environment, there is something fun that draws them into the situation. Depending on their interest, it could be a puzzle, a coloring book, a sticker book, playdough, a game, etc. Spend some time enjoying this initial activity with the child/adolescent. Remember, you want to pair yourself with a reinforcing situation!

IN PRACTICE

Remember that the preparatory activities included in the Sabbath School Curriculum for children provide students with a reason to learn the lesson. As this section of the curriculum aims to spark imagination ("Why should I learn this?"), look for additional activities in the Curriculum to support you in this initial pairing.

Create a fun learning environment. Do not check your watch and announce that playtime is over and now it is time to work (do a specific activity). Do not be afraid to appear silly, make noise, sing, dance, get messy, and roll on the floor. The child/adolescent will be less inclined to escape the situation if it is enjoyable and reinforcing.

Remember that one of the main goals of the Curriculum is to provide active learning, fostering a playful and meaningful learning environment; furthermore, the proposed activities aim to actively engage children in the learning experience, considering the various ways they learn.

Start with a smaller number of attempts for each activity and gradually increase. In the beginning, you might not be able to finish all activities; start with shorter ones and extend the duration based on the child/adolescent's capacity. Alternate between easy and difficult tasks (if all tasks and demands are

difficult, escape behavior might increase, meaning the child/adolescent will be more interested in leaving than staying).

Since the structured activities in each Sabbath School session are in the form of stories, and some of them are taught only when the content is considered appropriate for the age group, it is possible to adapt the lessons with the proposals presented in this document and reach children with ASD, ID, or ADHD according to the way they find it easiest to learn.

4. CHOOSE REINFORCERS THAT WORK FOR THE CHILD

Before actually starting to present activities, it is very useful to determine what types of things are reinforcers. Make a list and, first of all, set aside these items. You may want to set aside certain toys and games specifically for Sabbath School or worship time to make them special.

How to discover what these reinforcers should be?

Ask:
Ask the child, mother, father, siblings, etc.

Observe:
See what the child chooses to play with on their own. Remember, it might be unusual things that interest them - a box, shiny paper, a string, a mirror... Do not worry for now if these choices are unusual.

Force a choice:
Give the child/adolescent a choice between two options: - "Do you want stickers or a toy?"
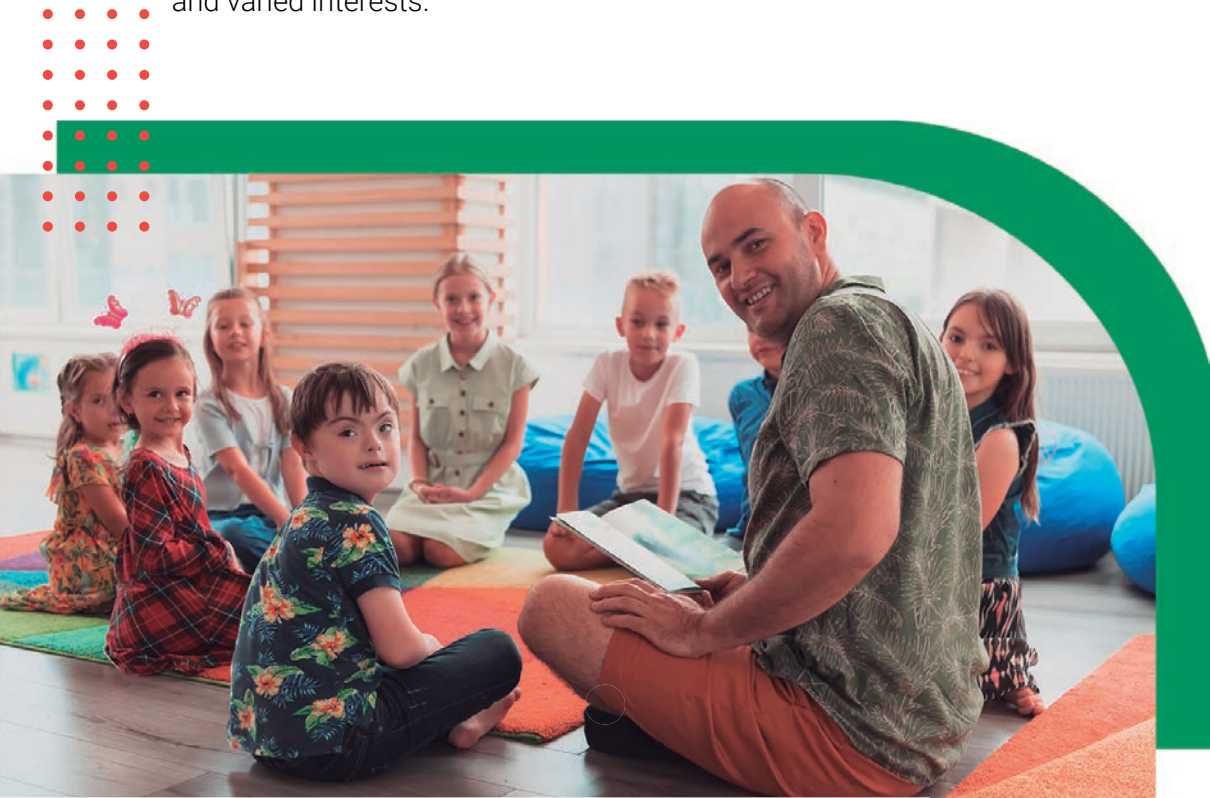
Try different things:

Give a different reinforcer each time and observe which one is the most effective and inviting.

Test:

Let the child/adolescent choose between different items from a box. It could be interesting to have a box with various cool things, so you can give them three or four different things at a time. These choices can be related to the day's story, reinforcing the Bible lesson and the child/adolescent's desire to participate in the proposed activities.

As you get to know the child/adolescent, you will learn their particular interests - toys, cars, puzzles, videos, etc. But remember: their preferences will change, and your task is to help them develop new and varied interests.

4.1 USE POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT TO TEACH DIFFERENT CONTENT

When teaching any content for the first time, the reward should be given after each successful attempt. This is called a continuous reinforcement schedule.

As the child masters each activity, we gradually reduce our reinforcement, moving from continuous (every time they do something) to intermittent (from time to time).

Why decrease reinforcement?

Why NOT reinforce desired behaviors all the time? Because we do not want the child to become dependent on our reinforcement to do something. We want them to want to do it on their own.

Continuous reinforcement is not a natural scheme, and therefore, we need to mimic the natural environment.

4.2 HOW TO USE REINFORCERS

Give the reward immediately! Even a small delay can allow another behavior to occur. For example, you ask the child to touch their head, and they do. Then, while you look away to get your reinforce-

ment, they touch their knees. When you give the reward, what behavior will you be reinforcing? You certainly do not want to reinforce inappropriate behaviors.

ATTENTION

Doing something right on the first request requires a big reinforcer - celebrate:

"WOW! YOU ARE THE BEST! GREAT JOB! YOU PUT AWAY YOUR TOYS! THAT IS HOW IT IS DONE!".

VARY YOUR VOICE, TONE, AND PHRASES USED

Keep in mind that variety is important when using verbal praise. Would not you get tired of hearing "Good job" or "Wow!" two hundred times a day?

BE SPECIFIC ABOUT WHAT YOU ARE REINFORCING

Be specific about what you are reinforcing: Always make it clear what you are reinforcing. This not only lets the child know why you

think they are "Fantastic," but also helps them learn the names of items or actions. "Very good!" - "You are great, you found the circles!" is better than "You are great!". "I like to see you working so quietly like that!" is better than "I like to see you working!".

4.3 MONITORING REINFORCERS

Monitor the effectiveness of reinforcers and vary them. Once the child/adolescent reaches the limit for something that used to be enjoyable, the reinforcer will lose its effectiveness. This is called "satiation." Educators often reserve items of interest and special toys for the class, ensuring that interest and motivation remain high. Reinforcers work best when the child/adolescent does not have access to them all the time.

Be prepared to switch to a different reinforcer immediately if it is no longer effective.

5. HOW TO TEACH THAT A BEHAVIOR IS NOT APPROPRIATE

Say that a behavior is inappropriate whenever it occurs.

Specifically explain why it is inappropriate, for example: "You took the toy from your classmate's hand without asking if she wanted to lend it to you."

Explain what the consequence of the behavior was, or the possible consequence, and how it made the other person feel, for example: "That made your classmate feel sad and she cried because she wasn't ready to share the toy at that moment."

Explain how she could have handled the situation better, for example: "You should have asked for the toy and waited for her response before taking it from your classmate."

6. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The suggestions presented in this Sabbath School teacher's guide are guidelines that can promote a greater sense of inclusiveness in children/adolescents and, at the same time, enhance cognitive development.

Thus, it is proposed that the teacher adopts clear communication. Using posters or drawings are resources that illustrate the intended goal and facilitate understanding. In addition to adapting language, lesson activities should be short and low in noise. Introduce dynamics and games to increase engagement and involvement of children in learning activities from Bible lessons.

The teacher will have greater success in capturing the students' interest and attention by proposing activities based on their interests. Select activities to exemplify concepts in a practical and concrete manner. Avoid overly lengthy and exhausting activities.

Explore everyday life and suggest small tasks, but always with short execution deadlines. Make use of the attached materials at the end of the file and utilize them in your church.

Believe in the potential of your students, encourage children to participate and complete the pro-

posed activities. The teacher's positive expectation helps shape learning behavior. Thus, the role of the Sabbath School teacher is essential for the child's spiritual development. A dedicated teacher who seeks wisdom from God will have an expanded mind and greater teaching capacity. Therefore, it is through daily communion that the teacher will be able to live and reflect God's love in the lives of the children.

More resources, please visit our website: **Faithfinder.com** or scan the QR Code

7. REFERENCES

ALBERTO, P. A., & Troutman, A. C. (2006). Applied analysis for teachers (7th ed.). Prentice-Hall.

COSTA, D. S., Malloy-Diniz, L. F., & Miranda, D. M. (n.d.). Learning from A to Z. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD): Learning Handbook. Impulsivity and Attention Investigation Unit - Nitida. Federal University of Minas Gerais. SYNAPSE. Interdisciplinary Society of Neuroscience Applied to Health and Education. INCTMM, LINC. SUPPORT: Pearson. Retrieved from www.pearsonclinical.com.br/cartilhaaprendizagem

GARDNER, H. (1995). Multiple Intelligences: Theory in Practice. Porto Alegre.

LEAR, K. (2005). Help Us Learn - ABA Training Manual. Autism in Brazil. Virtual Community.

LEFEVER, M. D. (2012). Learning Styles. CPAD.

MAIA, S. A. A., Neves, E. R. C., & Seabra, A. C. (2020). Reading Learning: Analysis of Specific Components and Self-Regulation Skills. In A. C. Seabra, C. A. Ferri, L. L. Vidal, & S. A. Maia (Eds.), Learning: Understanding, Challenges, and Possibilities (2nd ed., Vol. 2, pp. 65-82). CRV.

MAIA, S. A. A., Neves, E. R. C., Liedek, E., Neri, F., Ferri, C. A., & Seabra, A. (2020). Reading and Writing: Self-Regulatory Strategies, Acquisition Models, and New Technologies in Education. In A. Licório, C. Ferri, E. R. C. Neves, F. Neri, S. Quadros, & S. A. Maia (Eds.), Literacy: Paths to Learning (Vol. 1, pp. 19-53). UNASPRESS.

MCA/UCB/DSA. (2001). Grace Link-Curriculum: Training Seminar. Artur Nogueira.

PUESCHEL, S. M., Scola, P. S., Weidenman, L. E., & Bernier, J. C. (1995). The special child. Paul H. Brookes.

VOLKMAR, F. R., Lord, C., Bailey, A., Schultz, R. T., & Klin, A. (2004). Autism and pervasive developmental disorders. Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 45, 135-170.