

EASTVIEW CHRISTIAN CHURCH



special needs
MINISTRY

BUDDY HANDBOOK

Welcome

The Special Needs Ministry (SNM) of Eastview Christian Church exists for people with different needs and their families.

By use of Sunday programs and other services, we seek to encourage spiritual development and relationships as well as provide support in order to provide opportunities for our friends to fully participate and be included in all areas of church life.

We believe in God's value for every human life and we believe that Jesus desires a personal relationship with every person, regardless of their abilities or disabilities. Out of these beliefs, the SNM was created and it is the desire of the church leadership, family and ministry to partner with parents in developing plans to appropriately accommodate each participant in the church setting. Ensuring the safety of any child (with or without special needs) and of those around them is the top priority of our church.

Part of the purpose of having ministry policies is to provide staff, lay leaders, and volunteers a road map for solving anticipated challenges. By its nature, accommodation is more individual-specific for participants with different needs than for typically developing children and students. Because we can't predict every possible need or issue that might arise, we stress here the importance of conversations when addressing problems and developing solutions. Often, the ministry's leadership is required to exercise careful discernment and judgment when determining how to apply the guidelines of the ministry.

Mission Statement

It is the mission of the SNM to help people with special needs to know God in meaningful ways. Our purpose is to "help meet the needs of persons with disabilities and their families so that they can be a part of the Bible teaching program and share in the blessings of worship and fellowship with the church family by giving oversight to the educational programs of Eastview Christian Church, making it possible for every person to be included. In line with these statements, the greatest impact in this ministry takes place in the relationships that develop between the volunteers and their friends and families.

Screening Requirements

The same screening policies for our church's volunteers are applied to the SNM. All volunteers and ministry leaders are required to undergo an appropriate background check (if over the age of 18), ensuring all prospective caregivers have no prior record that would compromise their ability to serve reliably and effectively in a ministry environment. Any convictions related to sexual abuse would automatically disqualify a person from service. Persons with any history of

sexual misconduct may use their gifts in other areas of the church, outside of working with children and individuals with special needs.

Eastview Christian Church has established four volunteer requirements that all wishing to volunteer in any ministry fulfill:

1. Have completed First Steps
2. Be a baptized believer (or working toward baptism)
3. Follower of Jesus Christ
4. Be a member or regular attender of Eastview Christian Church

The SNM also requires prospective volunteers to complete an application which is reviewed by the SNM Director. After the application is received and reviewed, the Director will meet with the prospective volunteer to learn more about the person's personal and professional history as well as to discuss potential volunteer opportunities.

Training Requirements

The SNM will conduct formal trainings a few times a year, however, there are always new participants and the need for more volunteers. In this case, "on the job" training will be conducted by having the new volunteer shadow a seasoned volunteer. Any additional, specialized training will be provided on a one-on-one basis as needed. New volunteers are required to attend a formal training at least once a year.

Teen Volunteer Responsibilities and Limitations

In order to have a successful partnership with teens, the SNM is providing concrete guidelines for our student helpers so that all responsibilities are clear. All teen helpers are subject to the leadership of every adult working within all ministry environments at Eastview. Teens are assistants and do not possess the authority to make decisions or changes to a participant's accommodation plan/schedule.

Teens will never be required to instill any type of consequences for a behavior problem and should work through the first three "R's" of behavior management (request, redirect, and remove, explained in the behavior management section). However, teens should refer any further problems to the designated adults when the need for further action arises. Teens should also refrain from offering any negative feedback on a student to the student's parents. All sensitive conversations will be handled by adult ministry leaders and never teen helpers.

Teens should also be sure to guard the privacy of the participants they serve and never reveal the diagnoses or other issues to people without the need to know or outside the ministry.

Additionally, teens should also refer significant conflicts they experience with other volunteers to adult ministry leaders.

Tasks teens can be expected to help with:

- Giving one-on-one help to kids during activities
- Keeping track of kids, transitioning children between activities and settings
- Help set up
- Keeping the sensory rooms clean
- If you are unclear what to do, ask the teacher

Dos and Don'ts:

- No cell phone use
- No pictures, no texting pictures of kids, no posting pictures to social media
- Avoid carrying the children; no piggyback rides
- Stay with your assigned student unless you've cleared it with a Team Leader or the Director
- Always protect the privacy of the child and their family
- Don't invite your friends to visit you or the sensory rooms
- If you know you are going to be gone, find a substitute. If no substitute can be found, contact a Team Leader or the Director well in advance (at least 48 hours in advance)

Behavior Management

It is important to avoid handling any child physically as much as possible. Physical restraint is to be avoided at all costs. If any volunteer sees signs that a child's behavior is headed in an undesirable direction, every effort should be made to contain the situation before physical force is required. Parents may need to be paged for their immediate attention and help so the need for physical restraint can be avoided. Physical force is an absolute last resort and used only to prevent or minimize imminent physical harm to the child or others. As a general rule, physical touch should not be applied in any way beyond what is appropriate for a typically developing child. Some students benefit from deep pressure and hugs to meet their unique sensory needs. In these instances, volunteers would receive specific training for this and parental approval will be obtained before clearance is given for a volunteer's use.

The R's of Behavior Management:

Request a child to stop disruptive or harmful behavior. Give children the freedom to fidget; pick your battles wisely.

Redirect misbehaving children. Ask the child a question on an unrelated subject to break the focus or the conflict. Provide the child an alternative such as a toy, and ask the child to help with a task in another part of the room.

Remove obstacles. Recognize the underlying cause. If the child is tired, suggest a chill-out time on a beanbag or chair. If the child is hungry, provide a small snack. If a certain toy is causing constant conflict, tell the toy “bye-bye” and put it out of eyesight for everyone.

Responsibility for instilling consequences or hard conversations will always be with the adults and never with teen volunteers.

Parent Communication

Parents of children with special needs are accustomed to receiving negative reports on their child, especially as it pertains to behavior. An important reminder is the importance of being flexible and laid back. There are so many factors which affect a child’s behavior. Volunteer conversations with parents are best when not loaded with bad reports about a child’s behavior. If a parent inquires about their child’s behavior and demeanor during his/her church experience, there are times that candid feedback can be helpful, however, a positive relationship with the family is necessary so that they know their child is loved and valued and will not be “kicked out” of the ministry. Volunteers need to remember that they can never provide enough affirmation. If a child has had an especially difficult time, an adult who has a relationship with the family needs to lovingly share the concerns. Volunteers should never underestimate your power to encourage and even influence parents, especially when children are leaving. One way to build relationship with the parents is to text them pictures during the time you are spending time with their child (after you have received permission to do so!). Parents experience such joy seeing evidence of their child’s positive experiences in church.

Additionally, if an exceptionally sensitive conversation needs to be held, the Director or Team Leader will address these topics with the parents.

Privacy and Confidentiality

The church has a responsibility to the participants and families we serve to honor their decision to entrust us with pertinent information about their child’s unique needs and diagnosis by protecting their privacy. Volunteers of the SNM should share participant information strictly on a “need to know” basis and only inside the confines of the SNM. Failure to respect and guard a family’s right to privacy may result in the immediate dismissal of a volunteer.

Special Needs/Disability Etiquette

The number one qualification for volunteers for the SNM is that they have a love for people with special needs and a desire to share God's love with them. Our volunteers come from all kinds of backgrounds and have a variety of gifts that God uses in amazing ways. While getting to know your friends and reading information about them is to gain information about them, here are some general tips that you may find helpful in working with our friends:

Don't Say: Special needs child/Disabled person

Do Say: Child with special needs/person with a disability (this is person-first language!)

Don't Say: Autistic child/Downs kid or Down syndrome child

Do Say: Child with autism/Child with Down Syndrome

Don't Say: Mental retardation or mentally retarded

Do Say: Person with an intellectual disability

Speak directly to the person with the disability. Even if the person has limited communication skills and utilizes an interpreter, look at and speak to the person with the disability.

Do not force an individual to look you in the eye. Recognize that neurological disorders may make an individual uncomfortable with eye contact.

Take the parents' lead. Use their same terminology when introducing the child and family to others.

Respect our friends as individuals. The SNM emphasizes friendship and mutuality – we are learning and growing together. To show respect:

Affirm your friend as an individual who has worthy opinions, desires and feelings

Treat them as you would their peers

Give help only when asked; do not assume that help is needed or desired

Allow time for your friend to make his/her own decisions and to communicate when asked a question

Accept your friend's work, showing that you believe s/he is capable

Be sensitive to any medical, dietary, or other special needs that require attention during the time they are at church

Toileting and Diapering

It is the policy of the church that any child who is over the age of 10 that the parents will assume responsibility for handling all bathrooming needs. If a need arises for a diaper change during programming times, the parents will be notified via the number system unless otherwise directed to come and attend to their child's needs.

A Few Notes Regarding Sundays:

- If you are ill, going to be gone, or unable to make it on a Sunday, please find a substitute. If a substitute cannot be obtained, contact your Team Leader or the Director so that a substitute can be found. Please also contact your assigned child's family, informing them that you will be absent and who the substitute will be.
- When working, turn off your cell phone and put it away.
- Arrive 10 minutes early to your assigned area and remember that your "friend" is expecting YOU, not your family and friends to accompany them to their activity.
- If you find that you are unable to continue in your capacity, contact the Director ASAP so that she can find your replacement.

Building Relationships Beyond Sundays

You will quickly learn that being a Special Needs Ministry Volunteer is not a one-way relationship and that your relationship goes beyond Sundays. Here are a few ideas for building a strong bond with your "friend."

- Visit your friend at home, work, or school (after getting permission from the family)
- Invite your friend to activities with you and/or your family (movies, park, etc.)
- Learn likes and dislikes
- Give small gifts or cards at birthday and holiday times. Many friends never receive cards from people other than their family members.
- Share prayer requests
- Go to their activities (sports, plays, school activities)
- Simple activities such as going for an ice cream cone or a walk in the park will give you opportunities to be with your friends just as you have with other people in your life
- As your friend grows in his/her relationship with God, you can encourage them and advocate for them to become fully participating members of our church family. When God's people – regardless of their abilities or other differences – serve God together, everyone is blessed and God is honored.

For More Information

Special Needs Ministry Team

- **Michelle Maris**, Pastor – mmaris@eastviewcc.org; (217) 638-8822
- Chasity Anderson, 5 pm Team Leader - cowboyfanchas@gmail.com; (217) 621-6583
- Kristen Drake, 11:00 am Team Leader – kristenndrake@gmail.com; (309) 706-5037
- Laura Karr, Transition Liaison – lkarr@eastviewcc.org
- Stephanie Buyno, Team Leader – sbuyno@yahoo.com

Eastview Kids Staff

- Jason Smith, Family Pastor – jsmith@eastviewcc.org
- Val Burcham, Nursery Pastor – vburcham@eastviewcc.org
- Ellie Wakeman, Pastor of 2 & 3 Year Olds – ewakeman@eastviewcc.org
- Stephanie Shifflett, Pastor of Pre-K-1st Grade – sshifflett@eastviewcc.org
- Amy Nika, Pastor of 2nd-3rd Grade – anika@eastviewcc.org
- Rachel Warren, Pastor of 4th-5th Grade – rwarren@eastviewcc.org
- Jack Patterson, Pastor of Eastview Kids Operations – jpatterson@eastviewcc.org

Student Ministries Staff

- TBA, Junior High Pastor –
- Matt Fogle, High School Pastor – mfogle@eastviewcc.org

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