

VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK





Bethlehem Buddies is our special needs ministry at Bethlehem Church. We have the unique blessing of serving people at every life stage - babies through adults - with special needs of all different abilities. We believe people with special needs are an important part of the body of Christ; therefore, it is essential that they are included and have ownership in every aspect of the church.





INCLUSION

Our preschoolers, kids, and teens with special needs are encouraged to attend classes with peers of the same age in Little Town, Kids Town, Midtown, and student ministry. Our goal is to help everyone participate at their comfort level, build a community of friends, and learn about the love of Jesus. All of this is possible with the support of a Buddy Volunteer - YOU!

INTENTIONALITY

We believe that individuals with special needs are honored most when we are intentional with our planning. We provide engaging and fun rooms, as well as quiet sensory rooms where a volunteer can take their Buddy if he or she needs a calming break or would feel more comfortable in a quieter environment.

“We are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things He planned for us long ago.”

EPHESIANS 2:10

WAYS WE ARE INTENTIONAL

- 1 Focus on strengths and abilities
- 2 Consider personality age, and interests
- 3 Individualized love, care and support
- 4 Buddy bags & sensory rooms
- 5 Annual events & respite nights
- 6 Pair kids/adults with a Buddy Volunteer



OUR TWO MAIN PURPOSES



To allow parents and caregivers to attend service and know that their child or adult is being loved and cared for. Discipleship starts with the family, and offering care for a child/adult while their parent/caregiver is being discipled is a big deal!



We want our Buddies to discover new life in Christ. They are all fearfully and wonderfully made, and we want them to know that they are God's masterpiece and that He has a plan and purpose for them. Whether they are in inclusion or in our Buddy Rooms, they will hear worship and a Bible story.

ARRIVAL

- Arrive 30 minutes before service.
- Print out your name tag.
- Check to see who you are paired with.
- Find your Buddy's form and read over their information to prepare for how to best support them.
- Be prepared to greet your Buddy in the Buddies Room (or at the Buddies Check-In if they go straight to inclusion).

GUIDELINES

- All Buddy Volunteers over the age of 18 must complete a background check before they begin serving.
- Volunteers should never be alone (isolated from others' view and hearing) with their Buddy. You must always be in groups of 3 or more.
- When traveling for inclusion, volunteers and their Buddies must always stay in the kids ministry areas and go directly to their class. (Ex: do not allow your Buddy to wander into other areas.)
- Stay within 6 feet (or arms' distance) of your Buddy at all times.
- Report any difficulties, problems, accidents, or injuries to the Buddies Coordinator, who will decide if a parent needs to be contacted.
- Respect the confidentiality of our families, and do not share information about their child/adult with others outside of the Buddy Team.
- Mandatory Reporter Training must be completed by all volunteers 18 or older.

BUDDIES ROOM SCHEDULE

- 15 minutes of free time
- Worship songs
- Bible story
- Story questions
- Optional activity/craft
- Snack time
- Free time until pickup

WHAT IS MY ROLE AS A BUDDY?

PLAN AHEAD

Confirm or decline your scheduling request by Wednesday each week.

PRAY AND PREPARE

Pray for our kids and adults with special needs, their families, and other leaders during the week.

SMILE AND BE ENTHUSIASTIC AND UPBEAT

Take the lead - you are your Buddy's guide for the service! Take initiative to talk, ask questions, and interact with them. Give lots of praise and compliments.

STAY WITH YOUR BUDDY AT ALL TIMES

For physical safety and to help them participate and interact, give clear directions (participation, what to do/ not to do, etc). Give clear expectations (ex: schedule, behaviors, saying "no"). You should only take your Buddy to the designated areas. Ask and confirm with the Buddies Coordinator before doing a different activity.



We are always positive to parents at pickup. We do not share anything negative; we only focus on the positive.

If a problem arises with your Buddy, immediately share this with the Buddies Coordinator. The Coordinator will make the decision to contact parents or speak with them at pickup.

We kindly ask that no items be brought into the Buddy Rooms without prior approval from the Buddies Coordinator. This includes food, drinks, toys, or any special item you would like to give to your Buddy.

HELPFUL TIPS & EXPECTATIONS

People with special needs are often unaware of what is age-appropriate or expected in social situations. As the Buddy Volunteer, you will need to help them navigate social situations with other kids or students, as well as interactions with you.

THINGS TO BE AWARE OF AND AVOID:

- Don't allow a child to sit on your lap
- Don't carry a child around
- Redirect physical affection (ex: some kids/adults will try to give you a kiss)
- Set clear boundaries (ex: "this is how we say hello to a friend")
- No back rubs or excessive tickles
- No roughhousing with children
- Never be alone in a room with your Buddy (isolated from others' view and hearing)
- Never take a child or adult to the bathroom without a Buddies Staff Member or Coach

APPROPRIATE DISPLAYS OF AFFECTION:

- Pats on the shoulder or back
- Handshakes
- High-fives or fist bumps
- Arms around shoulders (same sex only)

CONNECTING WITH FAMILIES OUTSIDE OF CHURCH:

- Never transport a child/teen with special needs alone. If they need a ride, arrange to have another adult or teen ride with you.



PROCEDURES

DISCIPLINE

- Be proactive with positive ideas to get your Buddy back on track (set a timer, or use stickers, schedule, rewards, wagon ride, fidgets, or noise-cancelling headphones).
- Return to the Buddy Room for a break.
- Text the Buddies Coordinator for help.
- Do not physically restrain children.
- The first step is the safety of the Buddy and others, while seeking help from the closest adult nearby.

RESTROOMS

- Ask your Buddies Coach for the restroom location for your Buddy.
- Volunteers should use a family restroom and not the bathrooms designated for our Buddies.
- Kids and adults with special needs should have as much privacy as possible.
- If they need assistance with their clothing, you must always get a Buddies Staff Member or Coach.
- You may keep the door cracked open in the event that safety or behaviors are a concern.
- Do not physically help them clean themselves.
- When the child or adult is finished, you may need to give guidance on hand-washing with the door propped open or another volunteer standing in the doorway.
- In the event a child has an accident in their diaper, pull-up, or clothes, please notify the Buddies staff member or Coach immediately.





EVACUATION

If the fire alarm sounds and stays on, or you are told by a Buddies Coordinator or Staff Member to evacuate for any reason, please follow these procedures:

- Calmly and quickly walk your Buddy to the closest emergency exit and meet in the designated area. Coordinators will get the check-in binders and emergency bags.
- Do not take time to gather any personal belongings.
- Meet the Buddies Coordinator in the parking lot. The Coordinator will immediately begin a head count using the check-in information. If you notice a missing child or adult, notify a Buddies Staff Member, Coordinator, or Coach, but remain with your Buddy and the group.
- Remain in the parking lot until the fire department or a staff member has authorized you to return to the building, or until the parents come for pickup.
- Inclusion Buddies paired with kids or adults in other environments will not return to the Buddies Rooms for any reason in an emergency. They will follow their inclusion group to safety and then meet in the designated Buddies location.

CHECK-IN/OUT AND SECURITY TAGS

- A check-in security sticker must be placed on each child or adult upon entering the Buddies room. The other sticker must be placed in the check-in binder. The parent or guardian will have a matching sticker.
- Upon pickup, the parent must have a matching number sticker to pick up their child/adult. A Buddies Coach or Coordinator will be assisting with checkout.
- Contact the Buddies Coach or Coordinator in the event that a parent or guardian has lost their tag.
- Children may not be released to siblings.
- The only exception for security stickers is for an adult who is either serving with Guest Services or is attending a worship service with their family.





MEDICATION POLICY

- Volunteers are not permitted to administer any type of medication to a Buddy in their care. This includes over-the-counter and prescription medications, diabetic instruments, epi-pens, etc.
- Any injury must be reported to the Buddies Director or Coordinator, and they will communicate with the parents.
- For any injury requiring more attention than some TLC (Including if a Band-aid is needed), notify a Buddies staff member.
- Individuals with known seizure disorders will have specific info and a plan-of-action form in their Buddy folder.





*“God creates nothing
but masterpieces.”*

- JEFF DAVIDSON

