



How to Make  
**T&T Clubs**  
Work for Everyone



*A Guide to Working with Special-Needs Children*

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# Introduction

The **goal** of Awana is to reach *all* boys and girls for Christ and disciple them in spiritual growth and service.

With this goal in mind, Awana developed the Friends program in the early 1980s to encourage special-needs children to succeed in the Awana club program. Although the program met with success, many leaders—and parents—expressed the desire for these children to be part of the regular club program and not to be a separate club with a separate name. By being called “Friends,” rather than Pals, Chums, Pioneers and Guards, many children felt left out and isolated.

We listened to your comments and suggestions and are working to mainstream special-needs clubbers into T&T. (After the 2003-2004 club year, Friends will no longer be available.)

In this Web document you will find ways to help and encourage these children — though *all* children can benefit from many of the techniques included here.



## Why Care?

You're doing all those run-around-before-club-things when you see clubber Caleb walking in with a new boy. Caleb sees you, grabs his friend's hand and drags him over for introductions. "This is my friend Billy," he says.

"Hi, Billy." You hold out your hand for a shake, but Billy just smiles.

"Billy doesn't understand things very well," Caleb whispers. "He's in a special class at school."

You immediately think, *I want to do my best for this child, but what is that "best"?*

A feeling of uncertainty comes over you.

According to a Harris poll, 47 percent of people are afraid of special-needs children. 57 percent feel uncomfortable when faced with a child with special needs.

Often that uncomfortable feeling comes because we want to do what is right but don't know what that "right" is.

The first question is this: Why should we care about kids like Billy?

▲ Because we want to reach *all* children for Christ

- ▲ Because some of these children (like children in any group) have low self-esteem, low motivation, poor concentration or difficulty making appropriate social adjustments
- ▲ Because some feel they have nothing to contribute — but they do
- ▲ Because some know they can contribute, but they aren't given the opportunity to do so (Church should be the one place where all people are dealt with in patience and given a chance to do their part.)
- ▲ Because they are especially sensitive to criticism, while also being self-critical
- ▲ Because their difficulties are often highlighted in front of others, which only serves to multiply and reinforce the difficulties
- ▲ Because we want them to taste the joy of success in all areas of the church, including Awana
- ▲ Because Awana can and should be a place where these children begin to build positive experiences

The Lord loves all children. We see His gentle care throughout the Bible and especially in reading about His earthly ministry in the Gospels. When the disciples attempted to push the children away, Christ commanded, "Let them come to me."

In another place (Luke 17) we meet ten lepers. They had been exiled to the area outside the city boundaries because no one wanted them around. Yet Christ had compassion and made them well. He became their Friend.

When reaching out to children with special needs, the primary obstacle in ministering to them is NOT their physical or mental disabilities. The chief stumbling block lies in our own attitude and ignorance. Ministering to special-needs children is fun, exciting, challenging, joyous, rewarding and, now and then, frustrating. We are limited only by our own expectations. Actually, isn't that what we can say about any ministry for the Lord?

But wait a minute. We need to define "special needs." *A special-needs child is one who needs assistance in acquiring or processing information.* Some children need both. For instance, a child with a visual or audio disability may need help in getting the information, but once he acquires it, he can intelligently process it without assistance. Yet a child with another type of disability may need continual guidance in the learning process.

Let's make Awana a GREAT experience for ALL clubbers!



## Now What?

You are introduced to a child who has special needs. What do you do next?

### 1. Make the child feel welcome.

Find out the child's name, and let him know he's welcome at club. Help him fit in with the other kids, and treat him as you would any clubber. Many special-needs children understand that they're different. They often feel isolated and lonely. Let them know that Awana is a place where they'll be accepted.

If the child hasn't come with someone he knows, assign a mature clubber or an adult to help him through the first night.

### 2. Contact the parent, and set up a home visit. Remember, the parents are the experts. They know what works and what doesn't work with the child.

The visit benefits both you and the child. It benefits you because you can talk with the parent in a relaxed atmosphere and get the information you need. It benefits the child because he sees you in a familiar setting. A home visit is:

#### An information-gathering time

Ask the parent to fill out an information form (see below). You will not have to include all the questions every time. Choose questions that fit the particular situation.

Become familiar with any medical considerations such as special diets, needed special equipment, lifting instructions or chronic health problems like allergies or intestinal problems.

Learn about the child's ability and achievement level, and make adjustments to meet the child's needs.

Partner with the family in developing a plan for the child's success in club.

For those with multiple special needs, find out if the parent wants the child to have a one-on-one adult partner. (An adult partner is someone who comes alongside the child, helping him with his physical needs, with his participation and with his learning.)

**Note of caution:** Although one adult may be chosen to help a clubber, two adults need to be in the room or area at all times. This is a rule with all clubbers, not just those with special needs.

#### An insight-gathering time

(This will differ greatly among children, so ask questions accordingly. For instance, if a child has lost the use of her legs because of an accident, your questions should center on physical ability, not on learning styles.)

Discover if any cues or signals are used with the child at home and school.

Find out what the child can do; focus on his abilities, learning styles and strengths.

Find out how the child interacts on a social level. What are the concerns or difficulties?

Find out about school assessments and whether she receives special-education services.

Ask about his current education functional level and performance and his behavior in a learning atmosphere.



Encourage input on what seems to work best for the child.

### **An informal gathering time**

Interact with parent and child

Observe interaction between parent and child. Is there anything you learn that could help you?

Enlist the parent's help and prayers, and be a prayer partner with them.

**Remember, the parents are the experts on their own child.**

### **Sample Parent Questionnaire**

**(Choose the questions which apply.)**

1. What does your child enjoy doing? What are his interests? How long is his attention span in this area?
2. What does your child dislike?
3. Would your child pick the computer, reading or drawing if given a choice? How long would she spend doing the activity?
4. Does your child hear you if you speak to him while riding in a car?
5. Does he wander off during games?
6. What time of day is she most alert? Most tired? What does she do when she is tired? Lie down? Sit?
7. Does your child prefer to be alone or with others?
8. How does your child handle conflicts with adults and/or peers?
9. Does your child speak easily? Articulate? Respond orally? Need physical gestures?
10. What is the number of commands your child can remember? Follow?
11. What skills does your child possess in which he is more capable than his peers?
12. What comes easily for your child?
13. When your child seems most content, happy, relaxed, what is she doing?

### **SAMPLE INFORMATION FORM**

1. Child's name
2. Parent's name
3. Address
4. Phone number
5. Person to call in case of an emergency
6. Specifics about the child's disability
7. Dietary restrictions
8. Physical restrictions
9. Capabilities

Is there anything else you would like us to know about your child?

**3. If needed, choose a one-on-one partner for the child. If you and the parent decide that the child needs constant supervision or help, ask a person in your church to partner with the child. (Keep in mind that many special-needs children do fine on their own.)**

Ask for volunteers BEFORE the need arises.

If the volunteers aren't familiar with Awana, they should sit through a few club meetings to familiarize themselves with the club process.

Ask the partner to meet with the parent to get tips on working with the child.

Arrange for the partner to meet with the child in a calm, quiet atmosphere so they can get to know each other.

If possible, choose a partner whom the child already knows.

**4. Determine the child's capabilities in relationship to the handbooks, and work out a feasible plan to help the child achieve success.**

How many words can the child say at a time? (One? Two? An entire verse?)

Is the child mentally capable of learning a section but not able to recite it out loud? If so, work with the parents to find an alternative.

Does the child need several weeks in which to learn a section?

Does he need to write (rather than say) the verses from memory?

## **Sample letter to parents of other clubbers**

*(Use your judgment on this. Write a letter only if the child needs special consideration from other clubbers. You don't want to single the child out more by sending an unneeded letter about him. Reword the letter as needed – singular to plural – if you have multiple special-needs children attending.)*

Dear Parents,

This club year we have the unique opportunity and blessing of having a clubber with special needs coming to our T&T club. We count it a privilege to minister to the child and to the family. Please join us in welcoming and supporting this child as we learn more about a disability that affects hundreds of young children.

If you have specific questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to speak with your child's leader, the director or the commander.

Thank you for your prayers and support,

The Awana leaders at (your church's name),

(leaders' names)

### **5. Continue communication with the parents.**

- ▲ Be accessible, responsive and sensitive.
- ▲ Offer helping hands ... and respite care.
- ▲ Offer alternatives to meet needs by providing resources and support.
- ▲ Include the child in ALL activities, and allow the child to be as independent as possible.
- ▲ Treat the family the same as you treat other families.
- ▲ Never grow tired of listening and praying for needs.
- ▲ Develop a friend/buddy system to help build friendships.
- ▲ Consider starting a church support group.
- ▲ Have a special Sunday or club night to celebrate "Special Ministry Day."
- ▲ Seek to understand child, parent and family (siblings) needs.

### **6. Be a friend.**

### **7. Above all, remember that the Lord is with you as you minister to special-needs children and their parents.**

BHT is a preservative for food, but it is also a preservative for life.

**B...**Believe God has a plan.

**H...**Always **hope** in God no matter what happens.

**T...**Trust God; He is in control.

### **Believe God and His Word**

- ▲ God loves you and your child.
  - ▲ God has a plan. (Jeremiah 29:11)
  - ▲ God works despite our problems and weaknesses. (2 Corinthians 12:9)
  - ▲ God made your child. (Psalm 139:13-15; Psalm 127:3-5)
  - ▲ God's work will be manifested. (John 9:1-3)
- ### **Hope in God always, no matter what. (Psalm 119:114)**
- ▲ God's Word turns doubt into learning.
  - ▲ God's resources are unlimited.
  - ▲ God gives help and direction. (James 1:5)
  - ▲ God hears our prayers. (1 Peter 3:12; 1 Peter 5:7; Psalm 22:24)
  - ▲ God gives us the potential to enjoy creative and fulfilled lives. (Romans 8:18; Philippians 4:8)

### **Trust God, knowing He is in control. (Psalm 62:8)**

- ▲ God knows. (2 Corinthians 12:7-10)
- ▲ God comforts. (2 Corinthians 1:3-4)
- ▲ God reaches out to people with disabilities and illnesses. Look at Scripture. (Matthew 11:4-6; Mark 7:31-37)

# What Do We Do During Club?

## GAME TIME

Clubbers with special needs have the same basic needs and motivational drives as typical clubbers. Many things are learned through the avenue of play. Physical activity is fundamental to social growth and maturation. Activity also has the added benefit of improving health and the sense of well-being. Through Game Time, the clubber with special needs learns sequences and how to focus, maintain focus, select and shift attention, follow rules and plan ahead, all the while getting immediate feedback upon completion of the game. Again, remember that children have different levels of abilities and that not all clubbers will be able to do the same things. As much as possible, include special-needs children in the games with no special considerations. You could talk to them quietly and tell them that you won't give assistance unless they ask.

### Some things to consider:

- ▲ Make sure you have the child's attention prior to giving directions.
- ▲ Use simple, short sentences that are clear and concise.
- ▲ Avoid multiple steps. Check for understanding.
- ▲ Model what to do through telling and then showing.
- ▲ Be sensitive to which games are appropriate for which clubbers.
- ▲ Fine motor skills can be compromised, while gross motor skill is good.



### Some things to do:

- ▲ Develop a "Good Sport Thermometer." The child can earn shares for proper behavior/attitude.
- ▲ Develop a team cheer to help involve the child while getting rid of excess energy or the need to talk.
- ▲ Develop a clubber "T", or time out, signal as a reminder when behavior is not what it should be.
- ▲ Use different textures, sizes and shapes of game equipment.

## HANDBOOK TIME

This can be the most frustrating part of club for children with special needs. By adapting the work, limiting the number of verses, and teaching organizational and memory skills, these clubbers will progress. A corollary goal of Handbook Time is that these clubbers will develop a sense of responsibility for their work and gain independence. Remember, the goal is that all clubbers will be reached and taught God's Word. The goal is NOT to finish a handbook. Set high expectations, but do not cloud the real purpose of Handbook Time.

### Some things to consider and do:

- ▲ Explain the content of the verse. Make sure the child understands the meaning.
- ▲ Ask questions to ensure comprehension.
- ▲ Allow children to share what they think and feel.
- ▲ Use sign language, music and illustrations to teach and to help the child memorize.
- ▲ Put Bible verses on sentence strips. Have the child place the words/pictures/symbols in sequence.
- ▲ Encourage the use of colored pencils and felt tip markers to underline or highlight.
- ▲ Use mnemonics or other appropriate memory devices.
- ▲ Enlist parental support. Explain that the child needs a quiet work place, appropriate supplies, a progress check, a consistent routine, etc.

## How to Use Learning Styles in Handbook Time

(All children can benefit from the following suggestions.)

### 1. Kinesthetic-tactile

- ▲ Act out the verse.
- ▲ Use objects to stand for the words or the meanings of the words.
- ▲ Use hand motions and sign language to reinforce the meaning of the verse.
- ▲ Use an object toss game: toss an object to the child, have them say the next word and toss it on, etc.
- ▲ Use plastic eggs with a word written on each. Place the eggs randomly in the carton. The clubber must put them in the right order.
- ▲ Recite the verse while walking heel to toe, pacing or rocking back and forth.
- ▲ Use a magna doodle or white board to practice the verse.
- ▲ Make “fill-in-the-blank” memory worksheets.
- ▲ Use the balloon pop game: write one word on a slip of paper for each balloon, pop the balloons and put words in order. Play this during Game Time.
- ▲ Write the first letter of each word in the verse. (See if you can say it!)  
John 3:16: FGSLTWTGHOBSTWBIHSNPBHEL

### 2. Auditory

- ▲ Recite the verse together as a group. Use rhythm, emphasize same words each time, pause at same spot, identify key words or prompts.
- ▲ Set the verse to music. Use music tapes (available in the *Awana Ministry Guide*), make up your own melody or use well-known melodies.
- ▲ Choose a signal to remind the child to repeat the verse during the day or at club. Use teachable moments to review the verse.
- ▲ Say the verse in different tones of voice, as a mom, dad, granddad, little sister, etc.
- ▲ Say the verse in different volumes of voice – soft to loud.
- ▲ Replace words with a handclap. Continue to replace words until you complete the verse.
- ▲ Encourage parents to practice with their child before meals.

- ▲ Telephone the clubber, and practice the verse or section over the phone.
- ▲ Record the clubber saying the verse or section. Allow him to play it over and over.
- ▲ Play recitation games. Send words back and forth among the clubbers.

### 3. Visual

- ▲ Write the words, symbols or pictures of the verse on index cards, sticky notes or the chalkboard. Take away one word at a time.
- ▲ Design a poster or mural to portray the meaning of a verse or represent the words of a verse or section. Hang it in the handbook area or Council Time room. As clubbers get to the section, they can place their names or photos under the poster.
  - ▲ Glue cereal or pasta letters on paper to spell out the verse. You could also use old magazines or newspapers.
  - ▲ Use memory joggers, with symbols standing for the words of the verse.
  - ▲ Make a rebus, substituting words with pictures or symbols. Use ones that depict the word as well as the meaning.
  - ▲ Play Bible Match-Ups, a game matching the references with the verse or questions.
  - ▲ Tape references on the backs of half the clubbers and verses on the backs of the other clubbers. The clubbers need to match the verse with the reference.
  - ▲ Make puzzles. Write the words of a verse on different puzzle pieces, store in labeled plastic bags, and have the clubber practice by assembling the pieces in the correct order. An alternative to this is to cover a large puzzle with paper and then remove the paper piece by piece as you ask questions about the verse. The clubber should try to say the verse before all the pieces are removed.

***Keep in mind that many special-needs children are not learning disabled. For instance, a child who has a hearing or visual impairment may need assistance getting information, but he or she has no trouble processing it.***

## What if the child has ... ?

### A learning disability

- ▲ Use his learning style.
- ▲ Break learning into small steps.
- ▲ Shorten the verse to match the clubber's ability.
- ▲ Read softly or loudly.
- ▲ Use bookmarks to keep the clubber's place while reading.

### A speech impediment or stutter

- ▲ Use her learning style.
- ▲ Understand that the child can lose his train of thought. Help him get back on track.
- ▲ Instruct him to stop, think and then go on. If he gets stuck or loses his place, remind him where he is.
- ▲ Watch the clubber's lips to help you understand the words she is saying.

### Auditory Distractible Limitation

- ▲ Use his learning style.
- ▲ Allow her to use headphones.
- ▲ Allow him to use soft-foam earplugs.

### Dysgraphia

- ▲ Use her learning style.
- ▲ Use wide-ruled paper for Bible reading.
- ▲ Allow the clubber to use a computer to type the answers to questions.
- ▲ Allow her to use a tape recorder to tape the answers.
- ▲ Allow him to answer questions orally.
- ▲ Have pencil grips available.

### A language disability

- ▲ Use her learning style
- ▲ Have the child draw what the verse means using a scene, poster, bookmark or comic strip.
- ▲ Have her design a postcard, greeting card or T-shirt based on the verse.
- ▲ Have him make a story, game, mobile, memory basket, cube or scrapbook based on the meaning of the verse.
- ▲ Have the clubber pretend through role-playing. Challenge her to be a reporter, interviewer or TV announcer.

- ▲ Have him write a letter to a missionary.
- ▲ Have him write a story using a verse, riddle, commercial, diary entry, poem, song or newspaper article/headline.
- ▲ Have the clubber create a crossword puzzle, word search or book cover.
- ▲ Have her perform a song, drama, etc.

### ADD/ADHD:

- ▲ Use his learning style.
- ▲ Share Romans 7:15 and Isaiah 41:10.
- ▲ Avoid distracting stimuli, and use privacy boards (dividers) if appropriate.
- ▲ Keep clubbers in small groups.
- ▲ Understand that the clubber will do better with shorter periods of sustained work. Allow him to move around.

### Dyslexia

- ▲ Use her learning style.
- ▲ Explain the handbook layout.
- ▲ Read the material in a section. Ask the clubber to repeat and follow along. The clubber can read with the leader or read alone.
- ▲ Discuss the section to ensure understanding and comprehension.
- ▲ Have the clubber draw "what I know" and "what it means." It is important for the clubber to connect what she is learning with something familiar.
- ▲ Look at the question in the section, and have him write out the question and answer in his own words.
- ▲ Have the clubber make a list of what was in the verse: *The verse teaches me to do this. The verse teaches me not to do that. If I do this, this will happen.* Have her look for the pattern in the verse and figure out the cause and effect or any opposite comparisons.
- ▲ Use verse bingo or tic-tac-toe to review verse/section/questions. The clubber throws the beanbag at the board and says the verse it lands on. If she gets all the verses in a row, she gets "bingo" or "tic-tac-toe."

## Mental retardation

- ▲ Use his learning style.
- ▲ Slow the clubber's pace.
- ▲ Give extra individual attention.
- ▲ Present the verse/section in a variety of ways.
- ▲ Allow gestures, sign language, picture board or book or an electronic communication device.
- ▲ Teach the clubber to hum or sing the Bible verse.



## A hearing impairment

- ▲ Use her learning style.
- ▲ Use sign language.
- ▲ Allow the clubber to write the verse.

- ▲ Use signs or a rebus to teach or help the clubber memorize.
- ▲ Use puzzles to teach.

## A visual impairment:

- ▲ Use his learning style.
- ▲ Ask the clubber to sit near you so you can explain what is happening.
- ▲ Illustrate the verses.
- ▲ Use textured shapes with words, and have the child match by texture as well as shape.
- ▲ Code verse by numbers, sound, shape, color or material.

## COUNCIL TIME

Use this time to highlight the strengths of these clubbers. Many of them are talented in music and art. Provide opportunities for them to shine and contribute. Share stories of famous people who had special needs yet triumphed because of God. Take this time to share how they can be kind and considerate of one another, regardless of differences. God made them all, loves them all, died for them and has a plan for them. In the most critical ways, children with special needs are the same as all children—created by a loving God and sinners in need of a Savior.

### Components of Council Time

#### Announcements

- ▲ Review the rules and expectations of Council Time.
- ▲ Allow clubbers to hand out fliers.

#### Singing

- ▲ Allow them to hold song cards and help with the motions.
- ▲ Teach all clubbers to sign some of the songs.
- ▲ Recognize that they will respond to the music in their own way.
- ▲ Use audiotapes and instruments to add variety.

#### Testimonies

- ▲ Help them prepare their testimony, and teach them how to present it.
- ▲ Share testimonies of Christians, such as Joni Erickson Tada, who have special needs.

#### Bible Message

- ▲ Get their attention. Vary the tone of your voice, maintain eye contact, model excitement and enthusiasm, ask questions to generate discussion and interest, have a bag with a mystery object inside, and share past experiences.
- ▲ Allow them to sign the prayer.
- ▲ Focus their attention through different teaching techniques: flannel graph, audiotapes, lectures, drama, puppets, objects, role-play, pantomime, discussion, overheads, chalk talks, paintings, video, etc.
- ▲ Use multi-sensory, multi-learning styles. Engage all five senses throughout the story: the sights, the sounds, smells, tastes and touch.
- ▲ Keep their attention by including their participation in the repetition and retelling of the story.
- ▲ Present the story with a minimum of downtime.
- ▲ Use bright visuals with simple patterns, verbalizing what is in the visual for the visually impaired.

## AWARDS

The goal of awards is to encourage, motivate and reward the clubbers. Clubbers with special needs need awards just like all clubbers. Although awards are a little harder to use with clubbers with special needs, you can use them successfully. By keeping a few things in mind, awards can have the same impact on these clubbers. Motivation must be sufficient to maintain clubbers' efforts until goals are achieved. If the award is too distant or seems impossible to achieve, motivation will be diminished.

### What are intangible awards?

- ▲ Appropriate touch, gestures, hug, pat on head or shoulder, an arm placed around a clubber
- ▲ Words of kindness, smiles
- ▲ Positive statements such as "Super! Fantastic! Nice going! Great job! What a nice thing to do/say, That was terrific how you ..., I like it when you ..., Wow! Wait till I tell mom/dad how nicely or how hard you tried..."
- ▲ Thumbs-up signal, wink or other positive cues
- ▲ Recognition and praise for appropriate attitude, behaviors or clubbers giving their best. Be specific and consistent.
- ▲ A positive note home to dad and/or mom

### What are tangible awards?

- ▲ Badge emblems to wear on their uniforms
- ▲ Holding song cards during Council Time. Allow them to choose someone to help them.
- ▲ Holding flags during the opening ceremony
- ▲ Shares
- ▲ A list of privileges for them to choose from: leader's helper, first in line, choose where to sit, choose music, night out with leaders, etc.
- ▲ Stickers, small prizes, food, colorful pens and pencils
- ▲ Put clubbers' names in a jar for appropriate behavior, passing sections, etc. Allow them to pick from the jar to earn a turn to help.
- ▲ Helping with a bulletin board display or missionary report, playing an instrument or giving their testimonies to younger clubs

### What should I do if the other clubbers complain about special treatment?

- ▲ Develop a team or club award program. Teach clubbers that all children have strengths.
- ▲ Remind clubbers that ALL boys and girls lose sometimes and win sometimes. Build team spirit and social graces.
- ▲ Set a certain number of sections to be done by all. Include the accomplishment of special-needs clubbers.
- ▲ Design an on-task thermometer — if it's red, clubbers earn points; if it's blue, they lose points; if it gets real red, they earn double points for their team.
- ▲ Set up a peer buddy system. A peer buddy gets credit for helping the clubber with special needs. Join the buddies together to accomplish tasks.
- ▲ Have the entire club try to meet a team goal, and post their progress. For instance, fill in a large paper gumball machine with paper gumballs. When it is full, everyone gets a treat. Or, fill a large bowl with paper tortilla chips. When it is full, treat the clubbers to nachos and cheese.



# In Summary...

Whether you attend a large church with an existing special-needs ministry or have just one or two special-needs children in your club, we hope you found helpful tips in this guide.

But wait! This isn't all we're doing. We're also working on a printed leaders' resource with even more helps. We also plan to keep you updated on suggested resources, such as **Joni and Friends**.

And we would like YOU to help us. If you have suggestions for handbook helps, games, Council Time helps or just good tips for working with special-needs children, please send e-mail to [tt@awana.org](mailto:tt@awana.org) and let us know!



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