



Identity & Belonging



The SE Partnership is a collaboration of missional agencies, colleges and churches ministering to children and young people in the South East of England which includes the organisations below who coordinated/funded the BOOST 2018 Conference. Over one hundred delegates from many different denominations and representing all kinds of ministries among children, young people and the wider community gathered to receive input from a host of specialist speakers to explore the themes of Identity and Belonging.



This booklet includes a variety of material provided by those specialists in order that the conversations begun at the day conference can continue in local churches and organisations as we all seek how God is calling us to allow children and young people to truly belong and discover their identity within our ministries.



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Please note that the content provided in this booklet does not necessarily represent the views of the authors, the organisations that they represent or the SE Partnership Group but rather is provided to begin a conversation within local churches/organisations about their own theology and practice. The authors and the SE Partnership Group do not accept any liability for the content of books/websites/other resources referenced here nor do any references imply endorsement.



Welcoming Children and Young People with Additional Needs

20% of children and young people in the UK have an additional need or disability of some kind; if your church includes children and young people, some of them are likely to need additional support. So how does the church reach out to and meet the needs of these children and their families? What can churches do to include and create places of belonging for everyone?

Here are some toolkit and signpost ideas to help you:

'Inclusion Leader/Champion' or 'Church SENCO'

Of all the strategies that a church can put in place to support children with additional needs or disabilities, the most important and impactful is to have someone who 'owns' this within the church. Where a church has an Inclusion Leader/Champion or 'SENCO' (an education term meaning 'Special Educational Needs Co-Ordinator') it can be transforming. If this person has a lived experience of additional needs or disability, either as being disabled themselves, or as being primary carer for someone who is, then this is preferred.

Building support strategies with parents/carers

So often we can be reactive to the arrival of a child with additional needs, rather than anticipating that they might like to join us. Reacting is never as good as preparing; being ready with strategies in place for that child, worked through with parents/carers, so that they can be included in any activity that the church offers, is always better. Engaging with parents/carers, and with the child or young person themselves enables us to do inclusion 'with' the person we are supporting, rather than 'unto' them; an important distinction.



Recruiting one-to-one support or 'buddies'

Many children or young people with additional needs can become anxious and stressed if they are left to cope on their own. Having one-to-one support can make a big difference, providing the child with someone who can help them understand what is happening and what they are

supposed to be doing. To check that they are coping well and to know what to do to support them if they are struggling.



Sensory support

It is important to provide safe ways for children and young people with additional needs to be able to calm and relax.

A sensory room/zone, appropriately supervised and equipped with calming lighting, relaxing sounds, comfy seating/floormats, and with things for children to engage with to help them relax such as a 'fiddles box', will be helpful.

Using what they love to help them learn

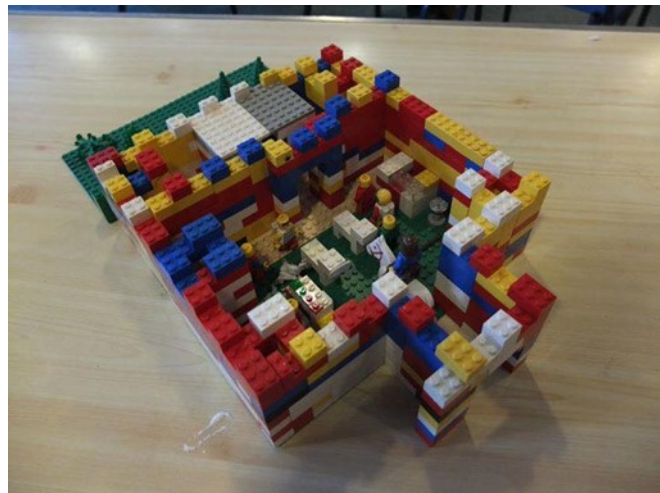
Most of us learn best when our learning is fun, engaging us in activities that we enjoy and are good at. 60% of us learn best by doing something.

It's no different for children and young people with additional needs; being creative by using crafts, jigsaws, Lego, or even Minecraft to help them learn during weekly groups will often deliver great results.

Did you know that there are Lego and Minecraft Bibles (as well as many others)?

Benefits

It can be easy for us to focus on the challenges around supporting children with additional needs but this would be to ignore the amazing benefits that doing this well can have for the whole children's/youth group and the church. Getting this right makes church a place of belonging for everyone, generating a culture of welcome, caring, support and inclusiveness that is transforming.



Further resources and support

If you use Facebook, join the Additional Needs Alliance: www.facebook.com/groups/additionalneedsalliance

For more information on Urban Saints additional needs ministry programme, training and consultancy etc. visit: www.urbansaints.org/additionalneeds or contact me at marnold@urbansaints.org or [@Mark_J_Arnold](https://www.instagram.com/Mark_J_Arnold)



**URBAN
SAINTS**

Mark Arnold
Urban Saints

Mark Arnold is the Additional Needs Ministry Director at Urban Saints, is co-founder of the Additional Needs Alliance, is a Churches for All and Living Fully Network partner, as well as being a member of the Council for Disabled Children. He writes a monthly additional needs column for Premier Youth and Children's Work (YCW) magazine, and blogs as www.theadditionalneedsblogfather.com. Mark is father to James, who has Autism Spectrum Condition, Learning Disability, and Epilepsy.



THE ADDITIONAL NEEDS BLOGFATHER

HOME ABOUT CONTACT

RECENT POSTS

What The Man With The Withered Hand Teaches Us About Disability And Church
February 22, 2018

By stretching out our hand in welcome, in love, to everyone, we are doing what Jesus would have us do; and in following his teaching our own lives are healed, and our churches become places of belonging for all.

Children with Additional Needs, Autism 'Cures', and Abortion Advice
February 15, 2018

Additional Needs Children's Work: Using What They Enjoy To Help Them Learn
February 9, 2018

Additional Needs Alliance

About

Members

Shortcuts

- Christian Youth Work
- Global youth work ne...
- UK Youth Work
- Children's Ministry

About this group

Description

*Discussion about ways to support children with special and additional needs (and their families) - and about raising awareness of the subject on the local and national church agenda

* A place to post questions and seek advice from the community (please don't share more personal details than necessary)

* Somewhere to share details of events and training for church workers and volunteers

CREATE NEW GROUPS

Groups make it easier than ever to share with friends, family and teammates.

Mark Arnold
Additional Needs Ministry Director, Urban Saints

NirV Accessible New Testament Bible

- Shorter sentences and simpler language
- A specially designed (16pt) font
- Bespoke illustrations to aid understanding
- More white space
- Single column setting
- Simpler navigation

[Click here to order online now](#)



Welcoming Children and Young People with Additional Needs: Case Study for Discussion

Joe is thirteen years old and has ADHD. He often feels a bit overwhelmed by his condition, as well as finding it hard to make and keep friends.

He attends club, which runs for an hour and a half. The club offers a combination of activities, games, crafts, refreshments etc., and a 15 minutes session at the end for a brief talk, a song or two and prayer.

Joe particularly finds the talk time difficult. Even though it is only usually 10-15 minutes long, he quickly gets distracted, loses concentration and finds himself becoming overwhelmed by impatience for the next activity.

As a result, he can become frustrated and agitated and this can sometimes lead to challenging and difficult behaviour.

What strategies can be put in place to help Joe to cope better with talk time and club generally?

Welcoming Children and Young People who are Siblings to those with Additional Needs

-  **Make sure that staff working with siblings of SEND (Special Education Needs & Disabilities) children are aware of their family/home situation.**

Ask parents/carers to keep you updated on significant events at home, for example, forthcoming surgery for their disabled child.

If a sibling's behaviour, mood or school work undergoes a sudden change, find out if that is in any way related to what is happening with their brother or sister.



If you gather information about children with SEND think about also gathering information about their brother or sister and how they may be effected by their siblings needs.

-  **Give siblings some extra time and attention.**

Siblings often find that most of the attention from parents and professionals is directed at their brother or sister.

Think about positive ways in which siblings can be given extra time and attention. Ask siblings how they are regularly on a one to one basis. This will encourage siblings to come to you for support at a time when things are difficult for them.

Talk to them openly about their brother or sister but also ask them about themselves.

-  **Help siblings develop their potential in areas where they can feel good about themselves and express their feelings.**

This could be, but is not limited to art, sport, music or drama.

Many siblings do not get opportunities to develop interests outside of school/home due to the demands and costs of care on their family is there any way you could support this.

 **Ask others to always address a sibling by their own name.**

Siblings are often referred to as someone's brother or sister by professionals and it needs to be clear to siblings that they are important in their own right.

 **Ensure that siblings are not used to support their brother or sister with SEND.**

Let siblings know that they are not responsible for the care or support of their brothers and sisters at church.

Avoid using siblings to interpret for or to assist their brothers and sisters with church activities.

Always ask siblings about the level of involvement they want at church with their brother or sister with SEND.

 **Be zero-tolerant of derogatory language about disability or SEND.**

Siblings and pupils with SEND are often teased and bullied because they or their family are different.

You may also want to think about ways in which our difference can be celebrated; that we are all parts of the body of Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:12-27)

 **Be sensitive to siblings' feelings and how their life experiences may affect their view of the world and God**

Many siblings worry about issues such as the implications of having children of their own, their brother or sister's life expectancy or what the future might hold in terms of their role as a carer.

Many siblings will feel they need to be perfect and to get everything right as they do not want to cause more difficulties for their parents/family.

Many siblings will want to be a great support to their brother or sister but also at times resent the way their needs affect family life.

Encourage them that it is ok to be struggling, that it's ok to experience a wide range of emotions and that God is with us even in our deepest struggles. (Isaiah 43: 1-2)



Having had a different experience to many of their peers can affect the way that siblings relate to and understand God. Our earthly experiences can have a significant impact on our relationship with our Heavenly Father and understanding our identity in Christ. (John 17: 20-26)

Further Resources and Support

Visit www.sibs.org.uk for more information on supporting siblings of children with SEND, including how to set up and run a siblings group.

Check out your [Local Offer](#) for families of children with SEND. Here you will find listings of all the support that is on offer to both the child with SEND, their siblings and the extended family.

Signpost siblings to www.youngsibs.org.uk – the UK online support service for siblings of disabled children under 18. Let siblings know that they are not alone and that other siblings have similar feelings and experiences.



Tasha Lowrie
Dreambox Education

Tasha Lowrie is the Director of Dreambox Education, www.facebook.com/dreamboxeducation





Welcoming Children and Young People who are Siblings to those with Additional Needs: Case Study for Discussion

Craig, aged 9, and his brother James, aged 7, have been attending church with their family for the last two years. James has autism, he has limited spoken language and can display challenging behaviour.

Over the past couple of weeks the children's team have noticed that Craig has not been his usual cheerful self. He has been grumpy and withdrawn and has showed minimal interest in the sessions.

What could be the causes of Craig's change in behaviour and how would you deal with this situation?

Welcoming Children and Young People who are in Care

All children and young people who are brought in to the care system at whatever point of their lives have experienced trauma of some kind. This could be because they have been subjected to abuse (physical, sexual and / or emotional), they have been significantly neglected and / or may have been witness to these things within their home context. Trauma significantly impacts the development of the brain and its impact can have lifelong consequences for children who are care-experienced.

There are certain things that are fundamental to a child's healthy development that most of us take for granted. Things like regular food, drink, warmth, a home to live in, love, nurture, safety and more. These form the foundation blocks for healthy relationships and development that last a lifetime. When some of these foundations are missing this causes challenges for children and young people in relation to how they form safe, secure, appropriate relationships. This affects every bit of their lives – how they form friendships, regulating their emotions, their ability to learn. The way that parents and carers respond to and seek to raise these children often requires a different approach. Therefore how we respond to vulnerable children and their family's needs to be shaped by a compassionate understanding of their context and a willingness to adapt our approach to make our groups places where ALL children and young people (including those who are care-experienced) can flourish.

Consider these areas...

Welcome

Consider some of the simple practical things that you can do to ease anxiety for all those coming in a new family :

Welcome packs – include information and pictures about the team and the room(s) you'll be meeting in so they can visualise it before. What are regular features of the group, for example do you follow the same format each week that you could include?

What about creating a pictorial / video walk through for your website / social media page so that children, young people and their families can actually see where they're going to be and what the space feels like. Remove as many unknowns as possible – think about sounds, smells, lights,

structure – the more information you can share the better!

Be sure to ask parents / carers (the experts on the child or young person) how you can best support their child(ren) and them. This will be an ongoing conversation!

What about a buddy system – pairing a new child / young person up with a peer or particular regular adult who can be their point of contact?

Behaviour

Many children and young people will find some of the expectations that you have in your group challenging to fulfil – even simple things like sitting still in one place.

Look beyond the behaviour – we can be reactive to the behaviour we see because it's awkward / different / doesn't line up with others. Let's never forget the child at the centre of it who's living with trauma – they're more important! The behaviour will usually be communicating something else – look to support the child / young person in that.

Value relationship over programme. Consider how we can help children and young people feel valued and supported rather than 'just' wanting them to participate in the programme.

Sanctions / time out are not helpful consequences because it reinforces to a child who lives with feelings of shame, rejection and fear that they're not good enough. Look for other ways to respond to challenging behaviour – talk to parents and carers.

Messaging / language

We can become so familiar with the language we use within our group contexts that we sometimes don't realise it can be exclusive rather than inclusive

Consider asking children / young people 'where's your grown up' or 'who's your grown up' (when they first come to visit)



instead of 'where's your Mum'. This immediately gives the child / young person the power to introduce their carer in whatever terms they're comfortable with.

Whenever you refer to parents, change your language to include parents and carers so all children are included (letters home, notices from stage, announcements at the end of the session etc).

Consider the different family contexts when discussing God as father (for example) or when planning sessions for mother's day or father's day. Even words and big ideas like being loved can have challenging connotations for a child who has been told they're loved by the person who also abused them

Wrapping around whole families

Supporting vulnerable children can be incredibly rewarding but also have times of extreme challenge. Consider what you can do to support whole families – the best way to find out how is to ask!

Supporting the children and young people in forming friendships so they're invited to parties and for play dates etc.

Find out what practical support could be helpful to families – are there some practical things which people in your church / team could be involved in helping to do to release the parents and carers to focus on those in their family.

Babysitting – there may be some additional practical requirements for many foster families BUT being willing to babysit once a month can make all the difference to marriages in families raising vulnerable children.



Claire Hailwood
Home for Good

Claire, as well as being the Support Manager for Home for Good (www.homeforgood.org.uk) is an adoptive mum to 3 amazing children and leads a church with her husband Jez. She has a background in youth work and has previously worked with vulnerable children and their families.



Welcoming Children and Young People who are in Care: Case Study for Discussion

Sophie is 12 and lives with her parents, Sam and Jess, who adopted Sophie when she was three. The family are fairly new to your setting and Sophie has become part of the youth work. Her parents explain that she's excited about being in youth but is also quite nervous, and this means that she can become quite vocally and physically dominating in a space and group and find it hard to engage.

Often when she arrives she pushes in to the room and starts to ask the other young people and adults in the room lots of questions, and then goes around the room picking things up and asking about them in an inappropriate way. In discussion times Sophie can be loud and dominant on occasion or appear to shut down and disengage entirely. The other young people keep their distance from her and it's clear that she's beginning to become isolated.

How might Sophie's early life experiences be impacting on her in this situation?

What might Sophie be feeling and what could you do to support her?

What can you do to help Sophie to flourish in your youth group and make appropriate, great friendships?

Welcoming Children and Young People who are in Domestic Abuse Situations

10 tips when ministering to those caught up in Domestic Abuse...

PLEASE HELP:

Pray about your level of involvement – don't assume.

Learn about other organisations involved in this type of ministry – do your homework.

Expect God to work in His way with those involved.

Actively listen to those who are being abused. Don't be judgemental.

Safeguard. Follow the procedures and inform them of who you need to tell. Be honest.

Ensure you set your own boundaries – physical, emotional, spiritual and keep accountable.

Help practically. Form a team of trusted people to share the support.

Exit strategy. Prepare a plan to reduce your involvement over time and communicate this.

Liaise with other agencies who can offer ongoing advice and support. Know your limits!

Prayer team - target specific people to pray for the family. May God's peace replace fear.



Colin Bennett
Moorlands College

Colin is the Vice-Principal (Development) and Director of Training for the Community and Family Studies Course. He became a Christian whilst training as a Youth and Community Worker at Westhill College in Birmingham. Following his training, he worked in Birmingham and Sheffield on a variety of high-profile inner city youth and community work projects. He is a regular writer and speaks on family, youth and community issues.



Welcoming Children and Young People who are in Care: Case Study for Discussion

Case Study 1

Jim was a young man (14 years old) who had lived with domestic abuse as the norm. He simply thought that all families functioned how his did as he was never allowed to have friends over to his house, nor go to his friends. This was due to his father dominating his Mum and his sister who was 6 years younger than him. Jim found solace at school as it was a place of some degree of peace. There wasn't the same level of shouting, although the comprehensive he went to was renowned for violence and bullying. Jim enjoyed science and his science teachers showed him interest though they were not pastorally caring.

How can you help Jim in his situation?

Case study 2

A well-known family in your church who are in leadership hit a crisis point last week and have separated. You learn that this is more than a disagreement and it emerges that there has been long-term domestic abuse. As the story unfolds, it comes to light that before they had children there were several occasions when the police were involved and they had separated previously. They had been encouraged by previous Church leaders to have children as they were told this would help them to grow closer together. They now have two children, 10 and 8. The nature of the recent crisis isn't clear, but you've heard from friends of the children that there was a violent incident leading to the most recent separation.

How do you stop the ripple effect of this news spreading throughout church?

How do you go about supporting the whole family in getting appropriate help?

What are some of the immediate next steps?

What resources do you have to support the children as they adapt to the separation?

Welcoming Children and Young People who are Asking Questions about Gender and Sexuality

How every church/organisation responds in these areas is so different, so rather than giving advice here we have chosen to list a wide variety of resources aimed at church leaders, children's/youth workers and young people themselves so each individual group can begin an informed conversation and build their own strategy. Not all of the resources listed here will theologially agree with one another, but we would encourage workers and church leaders to explore and engage with the various perspectives they represent.

† Gender Justice Resources

Gender Aware Youth practice by Natalie Collins

Training and Consultancy around violence against women and how to release young people from oppressive gender expectations. www.nataliecollins.info/consultancy

† Understanding & Supporting Trans and Questioning Young People

New book called '4 Views on Pastoring LGBTQ Teenagers' from a variety of authors, all with a deep compassion for young people's discipleship and wellbeing (see www.gemmadunning.com/p/4-views-on-pastoring-lgbtq-teenagers.html)

† Books for Youth Leaders & Church Pastors

Sex and the iWorld: Rethinking Relationship beyond an Age of Individualism by Dale S. Koehne

Just Sex? by Guy Brandon

Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body by John Paul II (Author), Michael Waldstein (Translator)

Real Sex: The Naked Truth about Chastity by Lauren F. Winner

Sex God: Exploring the Endless Connections Between Sexuality and Spirituality by Rob Bell

God and the Gay Christian by Matthew Vines



Is God Anti-Gay? by Sam Allbery

The Masculinity Theory by Joseph Gelfer

⊕ **Supporting Young People Who Are Exploring Their Sexuality**

A Guide to Growing Up by Sarah Smith

The Dating Dilemma by Rachel Gardner & Andre Adefope

⊕ **For LGBT Christian Teens**

www.livingout.org

diversechurch.website

Youthscape

Rachel Gardner

Youthscape

Rachel is the Relationship Lead at Youthscape, responsible for pioneering new ways to engage young people in healthy relationships. A best selling author of a number of books for young people, Rachel speaks widely on youth and faith related topics. Outside of her role at Youthscape, Rachel is the President of the Girl's Brigade England and Wales and a volunteer youth leader at her local church.



Welcoming Children and Young People who are Asking Questions about Gender and Sexuality: Case Studies

Case Study 1

Tom, one of the older boys in your Sunday morning children's programme, has two mothers who recently got married to each other. This Sunday, as you sign Tom into his group, he shows you a photo of his mum's wedding that he has brought in to show everyone. He is very proud of the suit he got to wear as chief page boy. He asks if he can pass it round during 'Share and Prayer' time.

What do you do?

Case Study 2

You run a weekly group in the Prayer Room at your church for girls in years 8-10 from the local high school. Although the team running the project are all Christians, the girls are from all faiths and none. Recently Cole has started to come along. Cole tells you that they are non-binary and asks if the next week they can bring their boyfriend along who is trans male.

What do you do?

Case Study 3

One of your young youth volunteers sends you a text message during the week to tell you that Amy, 14 year old a girl she mentors (who's family are senior in leadership in the church) has messaged her to say that she thinks she might be gay and she's scared about what her parents will say if they find out.

What do you do?

Recommended Further Reading/Resources

Children/Young People with Additional Needs

The Unofficial Bible for Minecrafters by Block

The Brick Bible: New Testament by Brendan Powell Smith

The Accessible Edition NIV New Testament

Comic Book Bible by Rob Suggs

Top Tips on Welcoming Special Children by Denise Abrahall

Special Children Special Needs by Simon Bass

He's Not Naughty! – A children's guide to Autism by Deborah Brownson

Siblings of those with Additional Needs

The life you never expected by Andrew and Rachel Wilson

I Have Needs Too!: Supporting the child whose sibling has special needs by Elizabeth A. Batson

Special Brothers and Sisters: Stories and Tips for Siblings of Children with a Disability by Annette Hames and Monica McCaffrey

Living with a Brother or Sister with Special Needs: A Book for Sibs by Donald Meyer and Patricia F. Vadasy

Children/young people in Care

Home for Good by Krish and Miriam Kandiah

God is stranger by Krish Kandiah

Children/young people in Domestic Abuse Situations

Free from fear: A practical path to freedom from domestic abuse by Colin Bennett, Lynn Chisadza, Karen Todd

Walking with Domestic Abuse Sufferers by Helen Thorne

Other Books Written or Recommended By BOOST Contributors

Growing Upwards: The Faith Journey of Christian Young People by Colin Bennett

Freed from Shame, Addressing the Stigma of Mental Illness in the Church by Dawn Holmes with contribution by Karen Todd

It Takes a Church to Raise a Parent: Creating a culture where parenting for faith can flourish by Rachel Turner



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www.separtnership.org.uk hello@separtnership.org.uk

