

## **Including Teenagers with Disabilities in Youth Ministry**

Ways to teach about Jesus and the Christian faith and include teenagers with disabilities in youth ministry.

- Remember that teenagers with disabilities are first and foremost teenagers, *not* a disability who happens to be a teenager.
- Learn how many teenagers with disabilities live in the community.
- Develop relationships with youth with disabilities. Do not be afraid to ask youth with disabilities questions about themselves.
- Ask parents about their child, their child's disability, and their own lives.
- Talk with special education teachers and read about specific disabilities; expect things to take longer and plan accordingly.
- Become an advocate for teenagers with disabilities and their families.
- Use a peer support or "buddy" system for teenagers with a disability. Safety is a first priority for any parent and youth.
- Utilize small groups to facilitate meaningful participation and promote interactions.
- Do not worry or be afraid of how much a teenager with intellectual disability is or is not understanding about Jesus. The goal is to share Jesus, not determine one's level of faith or understanding.
- Adapt programming and activities to truly include youth with disabilities. Do not just allow them to observe and call it participation.
- Educate leaders, volunteers, and youth groups on issues regarding teenagers with disabilities.

Adapted from an article by Terry DeYoung in *Breaking Barriers*, 2010