

Special Needs

A Jewish Perspective

By: Lauren Berg and Gabby Lusskin

What is Special Needs?

- Special needs is any person who might need extra help because of a medical, emotional, or learning problem.
- These people have special needs because they might need medicine, therapy, or extra help in school — stuff other kids don't typically need or only need once in a while.



What Kinds Are There?

- **Physical** – muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis, chronic asthma, epilepsy, etc.
- **Developmental** – down syndrome, autism, dyslexia, processing disorders
- **Behavioral/Emotional** – ADD, bi-polar, oppositional defiance disorder, etc.
- **Sensory Impaired** – Blind, visually impaired, deaf, limited hearing



Population Count

- One in five people in the US have some sort of disability
- That is about 56.7 million people or 19 percent of the population
- 15 to 20 percent of the Jewish population has a disability



Jewish Ideology

- Souls have levels
- People with special needs and disabilities have special souls
- People with special souls have a physical imperfection to object the soul's purity
- G-d doesn't make mistakes, it may be hard to understand sometimes the things that are done, but we do not know G-d's plan
- We have to trust that G-d knows what he is doing, and have *Ahavat Yisrael*, or loving a fellow as yourself

How
YOU can
help
?

How to Treat People With Special Needs



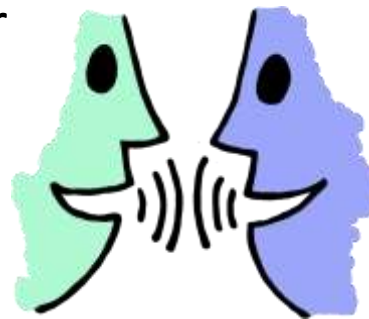
- **Assume the best.** Presume competence, and always err on the side of assuming that the child means well. Sometimes disabled children are assumed to be angry or disobedient when their disability is impeding their ability to move smoothly or process the demands being placed upon them.
- **Avoid assumptions.** Instead, ask questions if you don't know. If you're well-meaning, most people with special needs are happy to fill you in.
- **Don't fear disability.** It may be new to you, but to the person with special needs, it's a fact of life. Disability does not need to be scary.
- **Treat their disability and its symptoms as natural.** Kids and teens with special needs may be insecure about their disability. Treat it similarly to how you'd handle a peanut allergy: talk about it calmly and casually, and accommodate it without making a fuss. This sends the message that you care, and that their needs are not a burden.



How to Treat People With Special Needs(continued)



- **Talk to them the same way you'd talk to another kid their age.** Bending down and using baby talk might be appropriate with a two-year-old, but not with a twelve-year-old. Use a tone and body language that convey respect for them.
- **Don't disclose an invisible disability without consent.** Some disabled people can "pass" as non-disabled, and while this can drain energy, it also makes them less vulnerable to discrimination and intrusive questions.
- **Recognize their strengths.** Disability means they face challenges, but this does not make them devoid of strengths. Encourage their talents and cheer them on.
- **Let them support you.** Kids and teens with special needs are worthwhile people, and they often have something to contribute
- **See the person *and* the disability.** They want to be seen as a person, while having their limits and challenges respected. If you accommodate their needs, recognize their strengths, and listen to them, you will have achieved this.



What Can You Do To Help?

Educate Yourself:

- Research on the internet
- Talk to your clergy
- Talk to Friends/Family
- Meet and talk with the special needs population

Educate Others:

- Teach others – pass along your knowledge
- Teach your children about disabilities to create compassionate and supportive peers
- Start young - as young as preschool age

What Can You Do To Help? (continued)

Promote awareness & understanding:

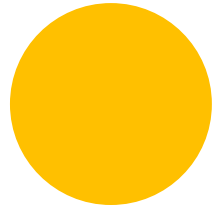
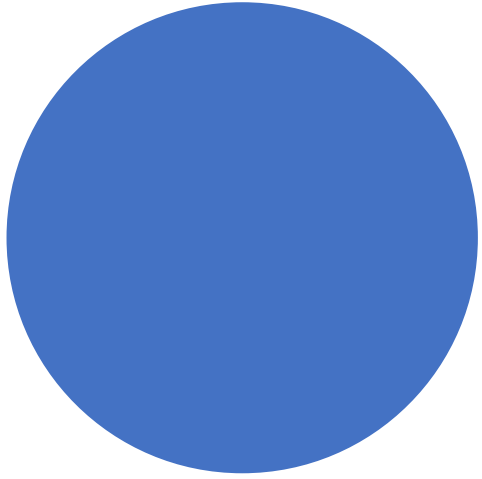
- Get the message out that we are all different
- Create an awareness and sensitivity in your community as to special needs community
- Break the cycle of isolation among people with disabilities
- Just remember that our differences are superficial and that we are all the same

DONATE Your Time: Volunteer, Volunteer, Volunteer

DONATE \$\$\$

Get Caught Being Kind:

- People learn through example



Special Needs Organizations



Jewish Organizations

Friendship Circle International (Parkland & North Miami):

- 80 locations worldwide
- fastest growing Jewish organization for children with special needs
- each independent Friendship Circle is operated by a local Chabad Lubavitch Center
- entirely supported by each local community to benefit local children with special needs.
- brings together teenage volunteers and children with special needs for fun and friendship
- has cultivated friendships between 5,000 special children and close to 11,000 teen volunteers
- Benefits to being part of this group:
 - shared experiences empower the children and enriches the lives of everyone involved
 - teen volunteers learn the priceless value of giving, the curative power of friendship, and the vital importance of integrating children with special needs into our communities.
 - parents and **siblings** get much-needed break/support
 - www.friendshipcircle.org



Jewish Organizations (continued)

Yachad, the national Jewish Council for Disabilities:

- global organization
- dedicated to addressing the needs of all Jewish individuals with disabilities and ensuring their inclusion in every aspect of Jewish life
- aims to ensure Jewish persons with diverse abilities have their rightful place within the Jewish community
- help to educate and advocate for a greater understanding, acceptance, outreach, and a pro-disability attitude
- <https://www.yachad.org/>



Jewish Organizations (continued)

Jewish Community Centers:

- Most local JCC's offer social and recreational programs that strive to enhance the lives of children, teens and adults with disabilities (mentally, physically, emotionally challenged and/or developmentally delayed)
- Programs include: field trips, activities, and summer day camp programs
- Locations:
 - David Posnack JCC (Davie): www.dpjcc.org
 - Soref JCC (Plantation): <http://www.sorefjcc.org/about-us/special-needs-programs/>
 - Levis JCC (Boca Raton): Schwedelson Special Needs Department has embraced individuals with special needs and their families for more than 30 years. <http://levisjcc.org/special/>



Local Organizations



The Friendship Initiative (Coral Springs/Parkland)

- unites individuals of all abilities through friendship and redefine the concept of community
- provides programs to foster relationships between the special needs and “neuro-typical” populations
- all program goals are to foster a world that is home to all while influencing future generations
- Programs:
 - Fit Friends: focus on whole-body fitness and living a healthy lifestyle. Each participant is matched with a trained student volunteer.
 - Rock Dreams: each “Rock Star” is paired with his/her own student volunteer “Roadie” and sings and dances in groups that rotate between keyboards, guitars, percussion, and vocals.
 - Art Works: each Artist is paired with a student volunteer and explores a variety of art forms/techniques/media including: clay, paint, pastels, markers, pencil, etc.
 - Reading With Friends: each Reader is matched with a student volunteer Friend and explores the wonder of books through all of their senses.
 - Zen Friends Yoga: participants interact with student volunteers enjoying the beauty and relaxation of yoga. Benefits of Zen Friends Yoga: behavioral improvement, reduced anxiety, respiratory relaxation, increased communication, reinforced sensory integration, muscle relaxation and improved sleep patterns
- <http://thefriendshipinitiative.org/>

Local Organizations (continued)



- **Parkland Buddy Sports (Parkland):**

- Offers sports programs that create friendships among its participants from the special needs and typical populations
- Players and student volunteers are matched together for the entire season
- Programs: Flag Football, Soccer, Running, Basketball, Yoga, Tennis, Golf, Kickball
- Game Days divided into parts:
 - one on one time between players and volunteers
 - group stretch and warm up
 - game time
- Winning occurs when: a player steps on the field or court, overcomes his or her perceived limitations through hard work and effort and does so with smiles, laughter and friendship.
- motto of Parkland Buddy Sports is **“No Limits”**
- Players gain confidence and dignity through their teamwork and active exercise
- <http://parklandbuddysports.org/>

Local Organizations (continued)



- **ScentsAbility (Coral Springs)**

- Mission is to provide job training, employment and housing for young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities
- ScentsAbility Curriculum:
 - Team building/On the job training: teach young adults with how to punch in/out for their shift, how to use a cash register, stock shelves, alphabetize, count money, and how to use a computer to ring up a sale.
 - Life skills training program: training the team for life in the big world to give the young adults an understanding of what it is to be independent
- Product line includes: soy candles, Scent Rocks Air Fresheners, Magic Wax Candles, and Happy Hands hand sanitizer
- Host soy candle making parties for groups and organizations
- All products are made in the USA
- <http://www.scentsability.org/>

National Organizations

Easter Seals: Resources for autism, seniors, children, adults, military and veterans, employment and training, medical rehabilitation, camping and recreation, brain health. <http://www.easterseals.com/>

Unicorn Children's Foundation: Helping children and young adults with special needs excel in their communities. <https://www.unicornchildrensfoundation.org/>

Special Olympics: Through the power of sports, people with intellectual disabilities discover new strengths and abilities, skills and success. They also inspire people in their communities and elsewhere to open their hearts to a wider world of human talents and potential. <https://specialolympicsflorida.org/>

United Cerebral Palsy: Educates, advocates and provides support services to ensure a life without limits for people with a spectrum of disabilities. UCP works to advance the independence, productivity and full citizenship of people with disabilities through an network of affiliates. Programs such as: My Child Without Limits, My Life Without Limits, family support, employment guides, health and wellness tips, housing help, financial assistance, international resources. <http://ucp.org/>

The Arc: The Arc is the largest national community-based organization advocating for and serving people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families. They serve all ages and more than 100 different diagnoses including autism, Down syndrome, Fragile X syndrome, and various other developmental disabilities. www.thearc.org

B'Yachad by Mordechai Shapiro



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Any
QUESTIONS?

**THANK
YOU!**

