
VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

Working with Children with Different Abilities

Marvel Village



*"The Universe doesn't create mistakes. We ALL are
Created On Purpose. For a Purpose."*

Dear Volunteer,

Thank you so much for your heart to serve Marvel Village! Marvel Village strives to empower families with children with different abilities. Our mission is founded on the conviction that the Divine Creator has designed ALL human beings, regardless of ability, according to the EXACT specifications of His loving PLAN and PURPOSE for each unique and special individual. We believe that all of us are “Created On Purpose. For a Purpose.”

This volunteer handbook will serve as a guide to give you confidence when interacting within our Marvel Village as we cultivate love, acceptance, patience, encouragement and understanding.

From the bottom of our hearts, we appreciate your willingness to learn, serve, and personally grow to reach these precious children.

“Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”

- Matthew 25:40

Love,

Candice Fathi

Marvel Village Founder





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AWARENESS

If you have never worked with kids with special needs before, that's fine! There's no need to be intimidated. However, these are some good things to keep in mind when you volunteer:

- Ask the parents about their child with different abilities and learn about their history so you can better understand who you're working with.
- Imagine you are in a foreign country where everyone else speaks another language and you are trying to communicate something. This is what people with different abilities experience daily.
- Kids with special needs have a wide range of abilities, so don't be alarmed if the child you are working with is nonverbal or limited. They may just process things at a different pace than you do.



CHARACTERISTICS OF DIFFERENT ABILITIES

Behaviors are external, or what we see on the outside. But internally, each person has a variety of stressors and feelings, which can manifest themselves as behaviors. Behaviors are not good or bad, but simply an attempt to communicate. When working with any child with different abilities, the goal is validation, recognition, and redirection, not “correction” of a certain behavior. Below are some tips about different stressors and behaviors you may encounter as a volunteer.

- If the child you are working with is experience terrors or distress, stay positive and give them a chance to adjust to the situation.
- Be aware than some children are sensitive to light, sound, and/or touch, and these things can be triggers for them.
- Even if it seems like a child is ignoring you, that doesn't mean that he or she isn't listening.



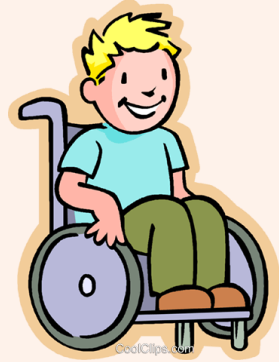
TIPS FOR INTERACTION

1. Making an observation about the child is a great way to connect (“I love your blue shirt!”). Try to focus on what’s positive and unique about them.
2. Don’t reach or grab for them, as this can be distressing. However, high-fives and thumbs-up are great!
3. Talk slowly and carefully so you can be understood.
4. Giving choices is better than asking yes/no questions, especially for nonverbal kids. Adapt and customize your interaction to each child’s abilities.
5. Always be flexible: they may have to use the bathroom or have other needs that you may not anticipate.
6. Always be positive and encouraging, and don’t forget to smile!



WHEELCHAIRS

Sometimes children with different abilities are not intellectually limited, but physically limited. One example of this is children who use wheelchairs. Kids like this are often good communicators, but volunteers should still take special consideration when working with them.



DO's

- ◆ DO squat down so you can “get on their level” and look them in the eye when you interact with them.
- ◆ DO place materials and objects within reach and not in inaccessible places.
- ◆ DO address anyone in a wheelchair themselves, not the person pushing the wheelchair.

DON'Ts

- ◆ DON'T grab their wheelchair or move them anywhere without asking—a wheelchair acts like an extension of someone's body, so please treat it with respect.
- ◆ DON'T lean, step, sit, or hang things on a wheelchair.

TALKING ABOUT PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

When speaking with or about people with disabilities, whether children or adults, you should use “people-first” language by putting the person first and the disability second. For example, “child with special needs” is preferable to “special-needs child.” It’s not bad to say someone has a disability, but it is not what defines them. People with disabilities are first and foremost people.

The next page displays examples of people-first language (from the Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities).

**PUT
PEOPLE
FIRST!**

Say This	Not This
people with disabilities/ different abilities	the handicapped, the disabled
people without disabilities	normal, healthy, whole, or typical people
person who has (or has been diagnosed with)...	person afflicted with, suffers from, victim of
person who has (or has been diagnosed with) autism	the autistic
person with a physical disability	a cripple
person who is unable to speak/uses a communication device	dumb, mute
person with a learning disability	learning disabled
person who is blind/visually impaired	the blind
person diagnosed with a mental health condition	crazy, insane, psycho, mentally ill, demented
person with a cognitive/intellectual and developmental disability	mentally retarded, slow, moron, idiot
student who receives special education services	special education student
person who uses a wheelchair	confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair bound
accessible parking, bathrooms, etc.	handicapped parking, bathrooms, etc.

CONCLUSION

Thank you so much for your heart to volunteer! We hope you have fun as well as change these children's lives. Welcome to Marvel Village!

"Where can children with different abilities and their families go to feel included and accepted? Marvel Village. The devotion and commitment to inclusion is apparent in every Marvel Village undertaking. The passion for reaching everyone with the invitation to come be themselves... is extraordinary and contagious."

- Donna Goldbranson, Founder and Executive Director of SPARC.

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