

General Suggestions for Children with Special Needs¹

- Find things that comfort the child. This may take some trial and error. For example, children with cerebral palsy seem to enjoy hearing music.
- Children need consistency. If something works for a child, use it often.
- Safety is a major concern (especially for those children who may have behaviors of hurting themselves. Try to prevent the child from doing these behaviors, if possible, or at least provide materials that prevent injury. For example, if a child with autism scratches himself, have the child wear soft gloves. **Always seek permission from your supervisor before working with those who hurt themselves, so that you are following the rules of your agency or school.**
- Get to know the child. They need a caring adult in their lives to feel a sense of security and a feeling that they belong to a group or family.
- If a child is not able to talk, you can try to get a child to respond to pictures or objects. Some children may also know sign language or may be able to respond to common gestures.
- Try some sort of schedule for a group of kids. For example, schedule a story time, snack time, or an organized game like Simon Says or charades at the same time each day to provide children with a comfortable routine. They will feel more comfortable if they know “what is next.” Scheduled activities will also allow a child to feel important and part of a group
- If possible, give the child a way to halt an activity or song or entertainment by themselves by providing/or agreeing on a signal to stop. For example, if the child appears to have problems communicating their wishes you may ask them if they could show you a way they would like to say "NO." You could demonstrate options such as push a ball, touch a "STOP button," move their hand to their lap, etc.

¹ University, Community, Leaders, and Individuals with Disabilities (UCLID) Center is an interdisciplinary leadership training program in developmental disabilities affiliated with the [University of Pittsburgh](#) and [Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh](#). UCLID faculty and students wrote these suggestions for helping those with special needs.