

# **CKM Friends**

## **Parent Handbook**

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## Why involve those with special needs within our ministry?

*“So God created man in **His own image, in the image of God** He created them; male and female He created them.”*

*-Genesis 1:27 (ESV)*

Why and how we are created plays a major role in shaping not only the circumstances of our creation, but also determines how we are meant to act and live our lives in the present and future. We are to follow Jesus’ example in His life, while appropriately responding to God’s mercy through His son’s sacrifice. To be created in God’s image denotes much more than physically looking like our Creator. It is an **identity** (Ephesians 4:24). The original Greek translation of the term “Christian” literally translates into “little Christs”. How wonderful is that! And with the identity of Christ endowed within us since creation, every other identity and label becomes secondary in nature.

How does that relate to special needs ministry? It is important to note that the differently-abled should always be referred to as “people with special needs”, or a “person with Autism”, rather than a “special needs person” or an “Autistic person”. Why is this important? Those with special needs are **people** first over whatever limitations they have, and in a broader scope, are **children of God** first (Galatians 3:26). They should be not be **defined them by their disability and limitations**. They are God’s creation, meaning that they are not a detriment to the Kingdom of Heaven, but an **asset**. And how much more are we called to apply that to the world around us? Regardless of who you are, our identity resides in Christ and we are to see others the same way. Black, white, poor, or rich, our primary label is always in being a child of God. And when we embrace our foremost identity, we unconsciously allow ourselves to embrace the differences that make us unique in God’s creation.

So it’s established that these children’s identities are primarily in Christ, but what are the implications of that? And why is the church called to do anything about it? Sure, we are commanded to love our neighbor (Mark 12:31), but there are quite a variety of outlets to do so. Why special needs ministry? In Luke 14, Jesus tells a parable about a great banquet, ultimately presenting the concept that when someone hosts a feast, you are to invite those that **do not have the capacity to repay you** (Luke 14:13-14). If Jesus was able to invite **us**, those who rejected Him, to the table, how much more so are we called to extend that invitation to **every** child? Earthly repayment is trivial, so we should be focused on serving those that may not be able to even offer a thank you. We are similarly commanded in Proverbs to speak for those in need and on behalf of the destitute (Proverbs 31:8). We cannot begin to speak for those with special needs if we

are not first taking care of them, extending love to them, and seeing that they grow spiritually in a loving community first.

We are not called to comfortably lead those that fit nicely into society's norms, but are commanded to ensure that we can proclaim His mercies, works, and faithfulness to every child, teenager, and adult made in His image, and to assure them that they all are forgiven, cared for, and are welcome into His kingdom. And if we feel inadequate, unprepared, or afraid, praise be to God, because God does not call us to be God, He simply calls us to be **faithful** and to let Him do the rest.

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of Heaven."  
Matthew 19:14 (ESV)

### **Crossroads KidMin (CKM)**

Families are one of the greatest masterpieces of God's creation. It is in the family that we see God display his love between, husband and wife, and parents to children. It is in the context of family that God sent his son to be born into. No two families are the same. Each is uniquely designed and created to tell His story

At Crossroads, we use the color orange to illustrate something really important. God designed the family to nurture the hearts of children (we symbolize the family with the color red) and God designed the church to shine the light of Jesus (we symbolize the church with the color yellow) but something can happen in the hearts of the next generation when the church and family collide. We believe these two combined influences have a greater impact than the two influences alone.

You see, being Orange isn't an event, or a program, but a strategy. We want to be intentional in building lasting relationships with parents and children.

## **What is CKM Friends?**

One way we are partnering with families at Crossroads is to acknowledge that everyone belongs here, including our families who have children with special needs. We want each child to come to church knowing they have a friend to go to church with, accept them for who they are and keep them safe. We want parents to know that they have a friend too, someone that they can communicate with and face challenges with.

CKM Friends is a ministry that breaks down barriers for children with special needs, allowing them to participate fully in Kid Min (Toddler-5<sup>th</sup> grade) alongside their peers. We accomplish this by pairing each child with his/her own “friend”. Our friends are trained to know and meet each child’s needs to make worship accessible for children of all abilities. This ministry allows families to attend adult worship and build community while feeling confident that their child’s needs are being met. It is our desire to come alongside individuals and families with special needs so that they are welcomed and included in the services and programs at Crossroads. We will work with each family individually to provide the appropriate level of assistance needed for each child so that they can learn about Jesus in a safe and loving environment.

## **Why do we have a ministry handbook?**

Part of the purpose of having ministry policies is to provide staff, parents, and volunteers a road map for solving anticipated challenges. By its nature, accommodation is more individual-specific for participants with special needs than for typically developing children and students. Because we can’t predict every possible need or issue that might arise, we stress here the importance of **communication** when addressing problems and developing solutions.

We believe in God’s value for every human life. We also believe that Jesus desires a personal relationship with every person, regardless of his or her abilities or disabilities. Out of those beliefs, the CKM Friends ministry was created to facilitate an appropriate accommodation plan for the individual with additional needs while working within the policies and resources of the church. The desire of our church’s CKM Friends ministry is to partner with parents in developing plans to appropriately accommodate each participant in the church setting. Ensuring the safety of any child (with or without special needs) and of those around them is the top priority of our church.

## **Contact Information**

If you ever have any comments or questions, please do not hesitate to reach out!

Phone: 757-603-3921

Email: [ckmfriends@crossroads.cc](mailto:ckmfriends@crossroads.cc)

## **First Time Visitors and Intake Policy**

**Step 1:** Fill out the “Family Profile” form and return to the CKM Friends Team. Only a staff member and our CKM Friends Team Leader will view this information initially.

**Step 2:** Once we receive your form, either church staff or our CKM Friends Team Leader will contact you and your family to have a face to face conversation so that we can learn more about your family and your child's strengths and abilities, explain our programming, and answer any questions you may have. This meeting will help us be able to best pair your child with a Friend.

\*\*\*If you are unable to complete these steps prior to your first visit, please visit the Guest Services Desk when you arrive. After your child is checked-in, we will need a parent/guardian to serve as your child's friend until we can complete the above steps.

## **Attendance Policy**

Every week, you will receive an email from Planning Center on Mondays and again on Thursdays asking whether you plan to attend church on Sunday. Please respond to this email every week by hitting “Accept” or “Decline”. For the CKM Friends team to be prepared with volunteers, a response is needed by **Friday at noon.**

If something comes up later in the week affecting your ability to attend on Sunday morning, please text [757-603-3921](tel:757-603-3921) or email [ckmfriends@crossroads.cc](mailto:ckmfriends@crossroads.cc).

If we have not heard from your family in **1 month**, then we will move your child's volunteers to a different child. When you are ready to start coming again, we will gladly restart the process of paperwork of finding your child a Friend.

## **Drop Off**

If you arrive early (or before your child's friend), we ask that you remain with your child inside or outside the classroom until your child's friend arrives. If this happens, please text the CKM Friends number so the coordinator can help.

## **Service Time**

To provide consistency for your child and to respect our volunteers time, you must choose whether to attend the 9am or 11am service. Unfortunately, we are not able to switch between services every week. If you would like to make a permanent switch to a different service time, please let a CKM Friends Coordinator know PRIOR to switching services. This will help us ensure that we have volunteers that are familiar to your child to help provide consistency and to help them develop a relationship.

## **Sunday Morning Worship Setting**

We strive to place all children and students with their peers. If a child is in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade at school, they will be placed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade classroom at church. We understand that each child has different needs, and we are happy to address any concerns through the intake process or through a meeting with a CKM Friends Coordinator.

## **Family Sundays**

Crossroads has several family Sundays a year in which Preschool through Elementary aged students all worship together with their families in the main sanctuary. Your child is always invited and welcome in the main worship room, however, we realize that it may not be a good fit for every child. On these particular Sundays, we will have some sensory items available in the Elementary classroom for you and your child. We do ask that this not become a play time for your child, but only if they are in need of a break.

## **Toileting**

For children over 5 years of age, we require parents/guardians to handle diapering needs. When a need arises for a diaper change and/or toileting issue during programming, you will be contacted by the CKM Friends Coordinator.

## **Accident/Incident Policy**

In the event that a child injures his/herself or another child, you will receive an accident/incident form upon pick up informing you of the details of the situation.

You will receive a form for any of the following behaviors:

- Biting
- Hits head on something (i.e. falling, running in to a wall, etc.)
- Injuries that involve blood (i.e. falling and scraping a knee)
- Anything that involves another child being injured
- Illness – vomiting, fever, dizziness, seizures (we will call family ASAP)

## **Biting Policy**

Children biting other children is a difficult behavior in early childhood ministry. It can occur without warning, is difficult to prevent, and provokes strong emotional responses in the child biting, the child bitten, the parents, and the caregivers involved. Biting is a natural developmental stage that many children go through. It is usually a temporary condition that is most common between thirteen and twenty-four months of age. Children bite for a variety of reasons: teething, frustration, boredom, inadequate language skills, stress or change in the environment, feeling threatened, or to feel a sense of power. No matter what the cause, biting causes strong feelings in all involved.

Kids Min desires to make disciples, beginning by meeting children and families wherever they are on their spiritual journey. Given this focus, our approach to addressing biting issues may look different than the approach taken by a preschool or day care facility. Because biting is often a developmental stage of childhood, KidMin hopes to take the opportunity for all children and parents to learn and grow through a biting instance. We strive to partner with parents to create an environment of success for all children and classrooms. We approach these instances with great care, being committed to holding the safety of the children and the inclusion of children and families in the body of Christ as our highest priorities.

Should a biting event take place, the following policy will be followed:

**One:** Only biting event in a 30 day period.

*(Biting Child)*

1. Child is immediately removed and redirected to other play, using words such as “biting is not okay- it hurts”. The staff will avoid immediate responses that reinforce the biting or calls attention to the child.
2. Incident report is filed and parents are notified confidentially at pick up. (Names not included)

*(Child Bitten)*

1. When necessary, child is separated from the child biting and is comforted receiving necessary treatment (Ice Pack, First Aid, etc.)
2. An incident report is filed and parents of the child bitten are notified confidentially at pickup. (Names not included)

**Two:** 2<sup>nd</sup> biting event within 30 days of another event (including 2 bites in the same day)

1. All Level 1 Steps are followed, but in addition, parents are asked to come immediately to consult with our staff and pick the child up from class. Child is allowed to return for the following class.

**Three:** 3<sup>rd</sup> Biting instance

1. All One and Two Steps are followed, and in addition an adult supervising the child biting is asked and need to accompany their child in the class for a 30 day period. Parents will also be notified of the possibility of disenrollment for the remainder of the class' duration, while reenrollment at the start of a new class period remains a possibility.



*\*If at any time a biting event involves broken skin, parents of both the child biting and the child bitten will be notified immediately for pickup in order to address the situation with the utmost care and to seek the best possible medical attention.*

## CKM Friends Ministry Covenant

Parents have a *right* to:

- ✓ Communicate with the children's ministry staff
- ✓ Enroll their child in Christian education that is safe, nurturing, and in line with our church's belief statement
- ✓ Identify and use their gifts to serve the church
- ✓ Learn about Christ and His plan for the family

Parents have the *responsibility* to:

- ✓ Provide thorough and complete information related to the child's medical, behavioral, emotional, and spiritual strengths and needs
- ✓ Remain at the church during Sunday programming and provide contact information during special programming
- ✓ Inform staff when they will not be attending Sunday programming
- ✓ Participate in problem-solving that is productive and Christ-honoring

Church staff/volunteers have a *right* to:

- ✓ Expect honest and respect from parents
- ✓ Expect honest and respect from children
- ✓ Serve in a safe environment
- ✓ Grow in Christ through their service

Church staff/volunteers have a *responsibility* to:

- ✓ Provide a Christian education that is safe, nurturing, and in line with our church's belief statement
- ✓ Thoroughly read parents' information about their child
- ✓ Keep information about children's needs confidential
- ✓ Participate in problem-solving that is productive and Christ-honoring
- ✓ Be on time and ready to serve
- ✓ Notify CKM Friends Coordinator of absences

Children have a *right* to:

- ✓ Learn about Jesus in a safe, nurturing environment
- ✓ Receive reasonable support for academic, behavioral, medical, or social/emotional needs
- ✓ Discover the gifts God has given them
- ✓ Use those gifts in the church body

Children have the *responsibility* to:

- ✓ Use words and actions that show respect to teachers and leaders at the church
- ✓ Treat other students kindly
- ✓ Demonstrate safe behavior
- ✓ Do their best work!

**Resources used to create this guidebook:**

Leading a Special Needs Ministry: A Practical Guide to Including Children and Loving Families by Amy Fenton Lee

Every Child Welcome by Katie Wetherbee and Jolene Philo

Children's Ministry Volunteer Guidebook by KidzLife