

# Kids With “Issues”...The Mission Field Next Door

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# Learning Objectives:

- Help leaders appreciate the scope of the ministry opportunity in reaching families of kids with hidden disabilities
- Explores obstacles that kids with emotional, behavioral and developmental disabilities (and their families) face in seeking to “do church”
- Review strategies churches can use to serve, welcome and include kids with “issues” and their families

# What are “Hidden Disabilities”?

- A hidden disability (HD) is a serious emotional, behavioral or developmental disorder with no outwardly apparent physical symptoms

# Examples of Hidden Disabilities:

- ❑ Autism, autistic spectrum disorders
- ❑ Developmental disabilities
- ❑ Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- ❑ Learning disabilities
- ❑ Anxiety disorders
- ❑ Mood disorders (depression, bipolar disorder)
- ❑ Attachment disorders (common among adopted, foster children)
- ❑ Fetal Alcohol Effects (FAE)
- ❑ Brain injury: resulting from trauma, epilepsy, stroke

# The Scope of the Problem:

- ❑ 22% of U.S. children entering first grade meet criteria for at least one mental health disorder
- ❑ 9.5% of U.S. children between ages 4-17 (5.4 million) have been diagnosed with ADHD...15.6% in North Carolina by parent report...2.7 million U.S. kids regularly take ADHD medication (more common in 11-17 year-olds)
- ❑ 8% of teens ages 13-18 have anxiety disorders, most with onset around age 6 (only 18% have received treatment)
- ❑ 13% of U.S. kids diagnosed with at least one developmental disorder
- ❑ One child in 110 has an autism spectrum disorder

Carter, AS et al. *J. Am Acad. Child Adolesc Psychiatry* 2010;49(7): 686-698

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/adhd/data.html>

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/anxiety-disorders-in-children-and-adolescents/index.shtml>

Boulet, SL, Boyle CA, Schieve, LA. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med.* 2009;163(1):19-26.

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/data.html>



# So What?

- Families ***in the church*** affected by mental illness pray less consistently, more likely to have one or more members who don't regularly attend church.
- 38% of foster kids on psychiatric medication...of kids on medication, 73% on two medications, 41% on three or more medications
- **Best guess**: Kids with mental health issues and their families are at least 50% less likely to be absent from church on any given Sunday, compared to their neighbors

Rogers, EB, Stanford MS, Garland DR. *Mental Health, Religion and Culture* 2011; DOI:10.1080/13674676.2011.573474  
Zito, JM et al. *Pediatrics* 2008;121(1) e157-e163





What barriers keep persons with hidden disabilities from coming to Christ or growing in faith?

# What are the barriers for kids with “issues” at church?

- ❑ Kids lack capacity for self-control
- ❑ Church environments are “hostile”...sensory issues
- ❑ Past negative experiences of church
- ❑ Family stress, isolation
- ❑ Parents with “issues”

# General principles of ministry with families of “kids with issues”

- ❑ You don't need to create a “program” for effective ministry
- ❑ Kids with issues don't think of themselves as “disabled” or “special needs”...nor do most parents
- ❑ Goal is inclusion in ministry environments, activities effective in building disciples
- ❑ Most kids won't need “buddies”
- ❑ Win...Whenever a child with a hidden disability or a family member experiences a meaningful connection with a local church

# Four things your church can do to reach families of “kids with issues”

- ❑ Serve them...Church-based or relational respite care, offer support services, access for support groups
- ❑ Train your children's/youth staff and volunteers on strategies to help them have positive experiences at church
- ❑ Consider your ministry environments
- ❑ Child care to support involvement of families in ministries key to faith development

**Provides FREE training,  
consultation, resources and  
support to help churches serve,  
welcome and include families of  
kids with hidden disabilities**

# Stay in Touch!

Church4EveryChild...Steve's Key Ministry Blog:

<http://drgrcevich.wordpress.com>

Diving For Pearls...Katie Wetherbee's Key Ministry Blog

<http://katiwetherbee.wordpress.com>



<http://www.facebook.com/drgrcevich>

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