



# SESSION 1

## HACKS FOR KIDS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

MISSION:  
**DEEP SEA**

**BY KIMBERLY DORPENYO**

### *HOW TO HACK THIS SESSION FOR KIDS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS*

In kids ministry, you've got a wide range of ages you need to engage every week, but kids with special needs tend to get overlooked, so here are a few adjustments you can make to this week in order to keep your kids with special needs more engaged.

#### **GENERAL TIPS FOR ALL SESSIONS**

**Worship time.** Use simple, repetitive actions for kids with special needs. If they cannot do the actions, have them jump up and down. Movement always helps memory and senses. Have noise-cancelling headphones available for kids sensitive to loud sounds. For kids using wheelchairs, have someone "dance" them during fast songs and hold up their hands during slow ones.

**Bible story time.** Many friends are visual learners. Provide a print out of pictures for them to follow, or provide a coloring page for them to color while you tell the story. If they need to move, provide their own action figures in the back of the room by the visual pictures so they can re-enact the story themselves.

#### **ACTIVITY | S.E.A. Agent Badge**

Have the badge pre-printed on a larger label so there is more space to create on. Many friends write bigger letters than other students. Have an older student or one-on-one partner put the child's hand on top of his hand and spell the name out loud while they write it together.

Additionally, some friends may need to give a high five or fist bump to connect with the other kids that they are meeting. Give them a chance to say each name alone. When they are done, have the crew celebrate.

**ACTIVITY | Sticky Toes**

Have baggies filled with blue hair gel and sea creatures. Make sure they are duct-taped shut, allowing the kids to play with these during this activity. Have them point out different creatures and squish them through the ocean gel.

**ACTIVITY | Crossing the Sea**

Have kids buddy up with a peer and walk through together. Wheelchair friends can be wheeled through while other kids hand them seashells. You can also modify this activity by placing the shells on blankets that volunteers are holding up instead of putting them on the ground, so that kids can reach them easily.

**THE BIG IDEA | People can help my faith grow.**

Provide hand motions to help them remember the Big Idea. Example: People (point to different people in the room around you) can help (raise your hands) my faith (hands to heart) grow (move a hand from the ground up in levels to demonstrate something growing taller).

**OBJECT LESSON | Parting of the Red Sea**

Provide a buddy with whom they can create this craft. You may also want provide a gatorade bottle instead of a water bottle so the lid is wider and easier for them to pour things into. Have a few bottles pre-made in case they are unable to make them so they can still play and take one home.

**REFLECTION | Tentacles of Faith**

Have an adult or peer help write and attach the strips of paper together. Supply stickers or pre-cut pictures of people they can choose from, like an image of a woman that has the word “mom” under it (also dad, grandma, grandpa, teacher, pastor, aunt, etc.). Also consider providing a squishy, [koosh ball](#) for them to squeeze during this activity. They will match the octopus, have tentacles, and provide movement and stress relief!

**ACTIVITY | Red Sea Sprint**

Allow friends to go back and forth in between different lines to the side if a race is too difficult for them. Wheelchairs can be wheeled in this game. If you are concerned about balloons being popped and getting wet causing stress, provide foam balls instead.

**MEMORY VERSE | Ephesians 3:18**

Have friends wave the “seaweed” while saying the verse to them. Shorten the verse if needed.



# SESSION 2

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#### **ACTIVITY | Lunch Launch**

Provide a buddy that friends throw with and provide a large goal for them to aim for. Consider turning it into a mini relay race where the partners can pass the items back and forth with each step they take toward the goal.

#### **ACTIVITY | Gifts I Have**

Create visual gifts on paper plates then glue them on popsicle sticks. Hold up the visual that matches the item being read. Pre-print matching stickers that kids can put on their shirts or hang posters around the room (or on traffic cones) that kids can go to in order to find a partner. This game creates a lot of noise with all the talking, so have headphones available.

#### **ACTIVITY | Lunch is Served Craft**

Provide a buddy and have some pre-made for friends who can't make one. They can at least color the pre-made baskets.

#### **THE BIG IDEA | My faith grows deeper when I use my gifts.**

Pre-write the Big Idea on a large piece of butcher paper or poster board so friends can match the puzzle pieces to the bottom line. Provide a bin of kinetic sand for them to play in AFTER they do the verse. If they cannot do the verse, just lead them to the sand.

**ACTIVITY | I Draw, You Draw**

Distribute a picture of the same item for everyone. Provide pre-printed pictures of possible alternative uses and have the students glue them to paper.

**REFLECTION | Gifts of Gold**

Provide a separate treasure chest with stickers or little slips of paper with a some gifts written out or drawn already for friends to put on their plates.

**MEMORY VERSE | Ephesians 3:18**

Pre-place a set of submarines on a poster board. Use velcro dots so students can velcro their matching submarine to the board. They may like pulling them off the board and putting them back on - the sound and feel of the velcro is often enjoyable for friends with special needs.



# SESSION 3

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#### **ACTIVITY | Beach Ball Bounce**

Provide a separate ball in a different area of the room and do the same activity one-on-one OR have a kiddie pool filled with balls in the back of the room or the hallway. Let your friends get in the bin of balls and take out a pre-printed picture of the answers to the questions. Have the one-on-one read the back of the pictures to them.

#### **ACTIVITY | Octopus Tag**

Provide a buddy for this game. If friends cannot play this game or do not want to play this game, provide a separate area where they can move like different animals in the sea, such as a shark (place fin on head and go from one line to the other); crab (walk sideways or crawl from one line to the other); fish (pucker lips and flap arms); dolphin (jump); ocean diver (swim around in designated space).

#### **ACTIVITY | Sunken Treasure**

Provide a big crayon (easier for special hands to hold) and let them circle the answers on their map while sitting with the group. Have them share their map with the group.

#### **THE BIG IDEA | My faith grows deeper when I spend time with God.**

Provide a separate kiddie pool with the same supplies, just take away the racing aspect so they can take their time.

**REFLECTION | Water Beads**

Have a separate container with water beads in it that our friends can touch and squeeze. They can also be in a ziplock back that is duct taped shut for them to squish around.

**MEMORY VERSE | Ephesians 3:18**

Put one word of the memory verse on poster board bubble shapes. Put bubble shapes on the floor in order and have kids jump from one bubble to the next saying the word.

**ACTIVITY | Deep Sea Coral Painting Craft**

Provide sponges to paint with so they sponge coral instead of blowing through straws.



# SESSION 4

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#### **ACTIVITY | Swimming Fish**

Have the completed bottles pre-made, but have extra balloons that kids can still draw a face on their whale and play with it outside of the bottle.

#### **ACTIVITY | Jump the Waves**

Provide a buddy to accompany them from line-to-line, let them march big instead of jump, and/or provide a similar activity in a different area.

#### **ACTIVITY | Spitting Jonah**

Make the origami fish ahead of time for our friends with special needs. Have kids decorate their fish however they want. As an alternative, make paper boats and have them play with a few pom-poms.

#### **SCRIPTURE | Jonah 1-3**

Provide a small bin that students can put their origami fish into and pretend to swim it around while listening to the story.

#### **THE BIG IDEA | My faith grows deeper when I share my story.**

Provide a buddy to hold and steady the pole. Have the Big Idea pre-written so they can match their fish to it.

**OBJECT LESSON | Dominoes**

Provide [cardboard blocks](#) that can work as dominoes. They need larger areas to draw and these will allow for a whole piece of paper to be stuck to them. Use large crayons instead of sharpies.

**DISCUSSION**

Create an emoji chart (like one you would see at a doctor's office to rate pain) and use them to discuss these questions. Here are some ways you might use emoji: 1) Jonah had to go tell the people of Nineveh about God (talking lips, surprised face, megaphone); 2) Jonah didn't want to go because he didn't like them and didn't think they would listen, so he ran away (angry face, monkey covering ears, boat, runner); 3) When Jonah got spit out by the big fish, he gave God's message to the people of Nineveh, and they all prayed to God (whale, megaphone, talking lips, prayer hands, happy face). Also, use a variety of expressions to help them communicate their responses for the application questions.

**RESPONSE | Sharing Your Story**

Provide pre-cut pictures (or stickers) with suggestions (e.g., mom, friend, neighbor, teacher, etc.). Let the students choose a picture and attach it to the fish. Provide a buddy to help them hang their fish on the net.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

# KIMBERLY DORPENYO



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Kim serves as the Children's Minister at Wentzville Christian Church, where she has been creating a VIP program for friends with special abilities. They now have one-on-ones for kids, a sensory room, and she is looking at adding sensory-friendly services at least once a month.

She has been in ministry in some capacity for almost 20 years, and her experience involves community development, city-wide networking, empowering women to lead safe groups for teenage girls, and pioneering multiple facets of ministry throughout Africa.

Her daughter, Makaela, is 9 years old and the light of her life. Together they thrive on knowing God and making God known. They are constantly serving in their church and community, believing the church has no walls but lives in the heart of God's people. Their newest adventure, is become a foster family for a family of 3 siblings!

She loves to sing, travel, and drink coffee...lots of coffee.

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