

# Special Needs and Child Support Services Ministry at Burnt Hickory Baptist Church

Burnt Hickory believes that every person, regardless of their abilities, is loved by God and created with the capacity to be an integral part of His divine plan. Our special needs and child support services ministry is missionally based; keeping, as the heart of our ministry, the goal of leading children and families to Christ, growing them spiritually, and creating a generation of Christ followers that will impact eternity. Our desire is for each child to discover their own identity in Christ and recognize their own value in His kingdom. We also recognize that we were all intended to live in relationship and to help support one another as part of His plan. As such, we offer a special needs and child support services ministry under the umbrella of Childhood Ministries.

## Our Ministry Options

We will work closely with parents or guardians as we evaluate and assess our ability to adequately meet the needs of a child.

- We offer a self-contained classroom with accompanying technology and sensory rooms for our preschool through elementary-aged students who might benefit from these support services. The classroom setting offers a lower teacher to student ratio. The classrooms are staffed with volunteers (laypeople) who are passionate to show the love of Christ to children. We adapt to the supportive needs of our youngest members with a modified version of our current ministry curriculum.
- We are also able to offer support services through a “buddy” program on a case-by-case basis, as evaluated by our child support services coordinator. Our buddy program is a partnership with youth volunteers and adults, who come alongside and help by offering some individualized support within a neurotypical inclusive classroom or worship setting. Our staff and volunteers do not have the education, specialized training, or ability to provide more than added support and encouragement. For this reason, children approved for the buddy system must be able to function and participate with same-age peers with only minor assistance and/or positive reinforcement from an assigned buddy.
- Should challenges arise (behavioral or otherwise), we may request that a parent or guardian, or qualified aid accompany the child; though it should be noted that any person serving under the umbrella of children’s ministry must pass our background check process and provide references. A family-provided caregiver or aid may only assist the child they are accompanying. They are not to be designated as holding any leadership or teacher roll within the classroom.

# Child Protection and Safety Guidelines

While our hearts are filled with love for our families and the recognition of God's imprint on every child, we also recognize we are limited in our capacity, as church staff and volunteers, to provide adequate services for all. We must prioritize safety above all else, otherwise our mission is not possible.

For safety and liability reasons, we are unable to offer support and services for:

- **Bathroom Assistance:** The children in our care must also be able to provide self-care when toileting, otherwise a parent, guardian or qualified caregiver must remain available to offer toileting assistance.
- **Behavior Safety Concerns:** We cannot safely accommodate children who demonstrate impulsive acts of aggression, combativeness or impermissible behavior towards others or themselves. As part of our child protection policy, volunteers and staff are discouraged from putting hands on a child to restrain him/her. Ongoing behavioral distractions, impermissible behavior or outbursts may require reassessment of a child's participation in our ministry options.
- **Specialized Services:** We are not equipped or able to provide therapy, professional counseling, psychological services, interpreting services, behavior modification help or programs, or extensive medical or physical intervention. In general, we can offer support services to children with mild disabilities including, but not limited to, mild intellectual disability, ADHD, high-functioning autism, down syndrome, mild emotional, behavioral and/or learning disabilities.

Burnt Hickory Baptist Church is committed to doing its best to meet the needs of the child, but if we are unable to provide adequate assistance to do this safely, it may be necessary for us to decline to provide support services (whether this be for a period of time or indefinitely).

If you would like additional information, or to schedule a tour of our facilities, please contact April Crosier at [acrosier@burnthickory.com](mailto:acrosier@burnthickory.com). We would love to meet with you and discuss how we might come alongside you and your family.