



Tips to being a good Buddy to a VIP!

VIP Kids are any kids with special needs which includes any physical, cognitive, medical or hidden disability, chronic or life-threatening illness, or those who are medically fragile.

- In meeting someone with a disability or speaking with a family member, remember that we are all made in God's image first and foremost, and our abilities are secondary to who we are as people. Always put the person before the disability, i.e. child with special needs, not special needs child; or child with autism, not autistic. They are a kid not a disability.
- Smile and greet the person with the disability just as you would anyone else. If they are unable to shake your hand, just touching or clasping their hand is fine. If they don't respond, don't worry. A warm voice is always welcomed, even by those who may not be able to respond in return.
- Keep in mind that some people may be sensitive to touch and sound. Remember this as you approach them.
- If a person is in a wheelchair, do not lean on it. It is not furniture; it is considered to be part of their body. Also, when talking to someone in a wheelchair, either sit, squat, or go to one knee.
- If you feel the person with a disability may not be able to reply in full, ask questions that allow for "yes/no" answers.
- If you are not able to understand what a person says, it is okay to ask if they would repeat their statement to you or ask their parent/caregiver to clarify.
- Try to include the person in whatever activity is available. Many times making small, planned adaptations or even quick improvising allows for people to get involved.
- Before offering food or beverage, ask the caregiver if it is allowed in their child's diet.
- Always ask before reaching out to provide assistance. Don't assume someone needs help and take action.
- Remember some disabilities are not physically observable.
- Wear your garment of love. Please remember to give the gift of kindness by being courteous to your VIP family. **If you are asked a question that you are unable to answer, please follow through until they get the assistance needed. Please speak with an event volunteer in a Smile Team shirt since they are there to help, or stop by a blue Nathaniel's Hope information tent.** Remember to smile! Bring a joyful heart and share that joy with others by being a friend. You will make a difference in someone's life just by sharing your love and concern.

Things you might want to ask your VIP friend

(It's okay if your VIP doesn't respond. Their parent/caregiver will answer when needed.)

- How old are you? Where do you go to school? What do you enjoy doing when you are not in school?
- When appropriate, you may ask about the name and nature of their disability, but please limit your questions.
- Find out ways someone can practically encourage and help a VIP family.

