



# CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

How your church can care for families raising children with disabilities during the First Thousand Days

## LUNCHTIME CONVERSATION REFLECTION

Sikunye seeks to equip and support churches to care for families in the First Thousand Days (FTD). This reflection is part of a range of Lunchtime Conversations hosted by Sikunye, aimed at equipping churches to become FTD-Friendly.

Listen to audio recording [here](#)  
Watch the video recording [here](#)

### John 9:2-7

*"Rabbi," his disciples asked him, "why was this man born blind? Was it because of his own sins or his parents' sins?" "It was not because of his sins or his parents' sins," Jesus answered. "This happened so the power of God could be seen in him. We must quickly carry out the tasks assigned us by the one who sent us. But while I am here in the world, I am the light of the world." Then he spit on the ground, made mud with the saliva, and spread the mud over the blind man's eyes. He told him, "Go wash yourself in the pool of Siloam." So, the man went and washed and came back seeing!*

## WHAT IS CHILD DEVELOPMENT?

Child development, as a baby grows, may seem automatic but each phase is unique and builds on the previous one. Child development has been divided into specific areas, but development in each of these areas happens at the same time to produce a range of skills in a child. These areas are:

**Did you know:** Healthy child development depends largely on good nutrition and emotional well-being. It is important for mom to eat nutritious food during pregnancy as a healthy diet is known to have a huge benefit on the developing foetus

- **Physical growth** (e.g. weight, height, how the body grows)
- **Emotional development** is how a child feels, their emotions
- **Cognitive development** is the way a child thinks & plays (e.g. problem solving, memory)
- **Language development** is how a child listens to and expresses language
- **Motor development** is gross motor or moving skills, and fine motor or finger movement
- **Sensory development** is how a child is aware of his/her environment (includes seeing, hearing, smell, taste, touch etc as well as balance)
- **Functional development** refers to a child's independence in everyday activities (e.g. dressing, washing, eating etc) and if they can do it on their own

## WHAT ARE DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES?

Development milestones are markers for the achievement of skills (e.g. walking, talking)

- They are used as a guide for health workers to monitor a baby's development
- They have been worked out according to when 50% of babies achieve a skill – this is the “average” development. The “normal” range of development happens a month or two before and after the “average” – each child develops differently and can achieve the skills within the “normal” development range
- Each stage of development adds on to the previous one, so if one is missed there is a gap and is seen as a delay in development. But often children overcome these gaps with no consequences, whereas others experience difficulties later in life
- When a baby does not follow the average development, parents worry, and this adds strain on relationships in the family – that is why *all new families need support!*
- A child's development does not reflect the parenting skills or that the parents have made a mistake

**Did you know:** Fathers who choose to be involved with their child who has delayed development or special needs tend to experience less stress and depression and their child does better?

**Parents raising children with disabilities need encouragement and support** – who better than the local church to support these families, with no judgement, shame, or blame?

## HOW TO BE A FTD-FRIENDLY CHURCH FOR FAMILIES RAISING CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

We listened to Jacqui Couper (author of [The Precious Years](#)) and Pastor Likeleli Molete, who gave us some practical tips on how to be a FTD-Friendly church in caring for families raising children with disabilities:

- There is a lot of shame in the way we view children with disabilities – yet we see Jesus moved towards people with disabilities and there is much we can learn from Him. Grow your understanding, learning and **Speak Up** on how we are all broken, but it is the way we “see” families and children with disabilities, without shaming or making the parents feel guilty that can make families feel supported and loved. Jesus was gentle, tender and he connected with people. Our biggest challenge is to accept difference in people, but we are all precious to God, so **build loving connections with families in FTD**. On a Sunday, show compassionate ministry – as a church, celebrate (e.g. month of Down Syndrome) and invite families in the community to join your service – the FTD team can raise awareness or hand out flyers about this disability and how as a church you can provide support and love.

- **Pray:** for families in your community that have children with a disability – this does not mean we have to pray for healing. God says we are all broken, but he is with us – as a church come around a family and say “we are with you,” pray for them as a family to not feel shame or guilt. Pray for moms who are left to raise their child alone, pray for the negative factors families face that make raising a child with a disability harder – and with that togetherness it will make each one of us whole. You can do this by setting up a WhatsApp Group to pray, or sending “prayer warriors” into the community to find and pray with families who have children with disabilities
- **Surround families:** do not blame parents for having a child that is different, instead provide support (financial or practical). For example, accompany mom to the clinic, help her have a voice at the clinic so nurses hear her if she is concerned; encourage parents to go to a specialist if it is needed; find out where the services for assessment and intervention are; have a pamper day for mom where women in the congregation give a hand or foot massage to moms, or take baby for a walk to let mom rest
- **Equip and prepare:** parents have a lot of fear – fear of their child's future, fear of who they are as parents, that support is critical because this may mean the parent is afraid to do something about the impairment – whereas with support the engagement with and interventions for the child is opened up. Encourage families to identify gaps in development early so that they are addressed in time; invite experts to come and speak to parents in your community; help families know which schools they can send their child to, or where the services are to support the child's development; help advise parents on whether they can get the Child Support Grant or the [Care Dependency Grant](#)
- **Collaborate and refer:** Link with other organisations and services in your community that are supporting children (and their families) with disabilities to refer families to or get the experts in to give good, trustworthy information (e.g. NGOs such as [Raising Hope SA](#))
- **Create warm welcoming spaces:** during the week or on Sunday have a space (e.g. a room, couch, or somewhere outside) that mom/dad can go sit and talk about how it has been raising their child with other parents, to get peer support and to speak about their frustrations, shame, guilt without judgement; have a safe space that during the week moms/dads can come to rest with their baby – someone can hold baby whilst mom/dad has a cup of tea; let mom/dad know that they are not a bad parent

## HELPFUL RESOURCES:

- Sikunye's [Home-visiting training](#)
- [A list of useful contacts for mom and dad](#)
- [Healthy habits during pregnancy](#)
- [Why young children matter daily devotional](#)
- [A prayer for baby](#)
- [Prayers for children](#)