

ADAPTIVE PROGRAM

Finding God

Our Response to God's Gifts

GRADES
1-8



LOYOLAPRESS.
A JESUIT MINISTRY

Parent Group Facilitator Guide

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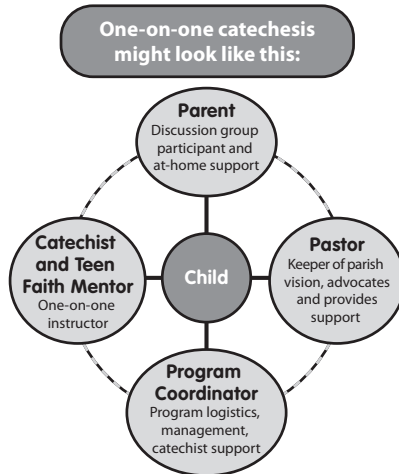
Welcome

Thank you for agreeing to facilitate the *Adaptive Finding God* parent group—a community for parents of children who participate in one-on-one catechesis in the *Adaptive Finding God Program*. The term *parent*, as used in this guide, includes guardians and foster parents; and is meant to encompass all those who are seeking the faith formation of the child they love and care for.

The catechetical process will be both challenging and rewarding for all involved. Parents will likely come to the program expecting to see new or deepening relationships between their child and God or others. What they might not expect is for their own relationships with God and others to deepen. As parents talk, share, laugh, and pray together, many will discover that their child's faith formation is a transformative experience for them as well.

Parents may also be surprised by the transformative effect their children have on their catechists, faith mentors, and others involved with the program. As the diagram below shows, one-on-one catechesis is actually a team effort. At the center of the team is the child, who, as the Church teaches, is not just the recipient of catechesis, but also its agent. (*National Directory for Catechesis*, no. 49)

Welcome to an adventure for the children, for the parents, and for you.



The Role of the Parent Group

What Is the Parent Group?

Parents of children with special needs face a unique and seemingly endless array of challenges. The parent group should help parents deal with some of these challenges—especially those that arise naturally within the context of catechesis.

The primary goal of the parent group is to support and encourage parents as their children are catechized and guided toward full involvement in the parish community and the Church at large.

How Can I Support and Encourage Parents?

As the parent group facilitator, the best way to support and encourage members of your group is to have a welcoming spirit. Many parents of children with special needs quite often have negative experiences in a variety of arenas related to the education and faith formation of their child—and those that occur in the church arena can be the most painful. While you cannot erase all parents' hurts and anxieties, you can help create a place of welcome and acceptance. This guide will assist you in doing so.

Another goal of the parent group is to elicit parent participation, which is essential to the success of one-on-one catechesis.

The Role of the Parent Group Facilitator

It's important for parents of children with disabilities to remember that they have a right and a duty to carve out sacred space for themselves. Many things change in the aftermath of having a special-needs child; some things do not. First and foremost—God still loves you, and you still have a need for intimacy with the Divine.

—David Rizzo,
Faith, Family, and Children with Special Needs

Facilitate Means “To Make Easy”

Raising a child with special needs is not easy, and you, as facilitator, can't make it so. What you can do, however, is open up a pocket of “easy time” in the complicated life of the parent.

Certain professional, spiritual, and interpersonal skills will help you do this. You may already possess some of these skills, and you may be developing others. That's OK. What really matters is your willingness to provide a safe and nonjudgmental environment in which frank discussion and mutual support can occur. If you are committed to creating such an environment, you're halfway there.

What Are the Parent Group Facilitator's Practical Responsibilities?

The hands-on aspects of this role are only as limited as your imagination and can expand and contract to fit your schedule and skills. However, at the very minimum, the parent group facilitator does the following:

- leads parent discussion once a week when the program is in session during the time established for class meetings
- maintains contact with participants during the week to provide information or resources they may find useful before the next meeting
- works with the program coordinator to provide parents with the resources and support they need
- maintains privacy and confidentiality within the group and within your relationship with each parent



Planning Meetings

As the year unfolds, your parent group meetings will generate their own rhythms. Rituals, patterns, and a shared language will emerge naturally. Like any group, this group will take on the personality and expressions of its members.

However, while it is important to remain flexible during meetings, it is equally important to plan adequately before a meeting takes place. A solid meeting agenda will give you firm footing and peace of mind as you enter an arena that can be unpredictable. Your participants, in turn, will sense that they are in good hands, and the meeting will have a much better chance of being productive and nourishing—even if it ends up going “off track.”

The Before the First Meeting Checklist on page 25 and the Sample Agenda on page 26 will help you prepare thoughtful, efficient meetings.

A note about efficiency: It's essential. A typical 45-minute session will pass quickly. Always overestimate rather than underestimate the amount of time a meeting component will take, and don't be shy about moving things along. For tips on how to do this in tricky situations, see pages 49–50.

Before the First Meeting Checklist

- Meet with your program coordinator to discuss goals, expectations, and logistics.
- Meet with your pastor or spiritual director to discuss hopes, fears, and helpful spiritual practices.
- If you have contact information for parent participants, send an e-mail welcoming them to the group and telling them where and when the first meeting will be held.
- Review the discussion topics listed on pages 28–34 of this guide. Decide on a general sequence for introducing the topics.
- Brainstorm possible speakers in your parish or the broader community and begin contacting them now to see if and when a visit to your group might be possible.
- Review and consult the resources listed in the Resources section of this guide.
- Visit the meeting space. Spend some time sitting quietly and visualizing what will happen in the space. Brainstorm ways to make it welcoming. List items you will need and consult with the program coordinator or your DRE about their availability.
- Complete a meeting agenda. Although the needs of your group will drive the content of your meetings, the format of your meetings should be consistent. See the sample agenda on page 26 of this guide. A blackline master of the agenda frame is available at www.findinggod.com/adaptive. You may want to photocopy the meeting agenda for participants.
- Prepare a sign-in sheet for participants. A sign-in sheet blackline master can be found at www.findinggod.com/adaptive.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your efforts and bless your participants and their children.