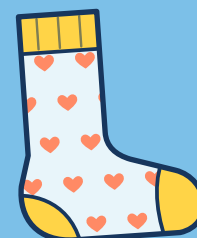


God Sees the Heart

Adapted Edition • Ages 5–6 • For Down syndrome, autism & other disabilities



Everything in “God Sees the Heart” adapted so every child can join in, including children with Down syndrome, autism, or other disabilities. It includes a picture story, a picture verse with signs, a 3-level heart craft with picture stickers, a picture-supported Heart Hunt, a visual schedule, a talk board, and a going-to-church story.

WHAT'S INSIDE

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START HERE

How to use the Adapted Edition

The big idea, “**God sees my heart,**” is a beautiful one for children who are often judged by how they look, move, or talk. These adaptations make sure every child hears it and gets to show what’s in their heart.

Same message, different doors

Every child gets the same big idea and the same Bible story. Adapting changes **how** they access it, not **what** they learn.

Presume competence

Assume every child understands more than they can show. Talk to them directly, at their age, not over or about them.

Ask the family first

Parents are the experts. Use the All About Me page before your first session and follow their lead on language and supports.

Belonging over behavior

A child who stands, rocks, flaps, or takes breaks is still participating. The goal is belonging, not sitting perfectly still.

Adapt for everyone

Many supports (visual schedules, choices, breaks) help the whole group, so use them for everyone. That way, no one is singled out.

Friends, not helpers

Buddies and peers are friends. Coach them to play *with*, wait, and include, not to take over.

BEFORE THE SESSION

- ☐ Send the **All About Me** page to families a week ahead, or chat at drop-off.
- ☐ Print the visual schedule, First-Then board, and communication cards.
- ☐ Set up a calm corner (beanbag or rug, fidgets, headphones, a few books).
- ☐ Prep craft pieces at all three levels (see the Adapted craft page).
- ☐ Brief your buddies (see “Being a great buddy” below).

BEING A GREAT BUDDY

- Get down to eye level and say their name first.
- Follow their lead. If they love trains, talk trains!
- Use short words, then **wait**. Count to 10 in your head.
- Offer two choices: “Red or blue?”
- Help only as much as needed. Hand-under-hand, never forcing.
- Stay calm and kind. If they’re upset, use fewer words and offer the break card.

A WORD ABOUT WORDS

Many people in the Down syndrome community prefer person-first language (“a child with Down syndrome”). Many autistic people prefer identity-first language (“an autistic child”). There’s no single right answer. **Ask the family, and the person, and use what they use.**

This Adapted Edition goes with the Ages 5-6 guide, “God Sees the Heart.” Use them together. These are practical ministry tips, not medical or therapy advice. Families and their care teams know what works best for their child.

QUICK GUIDE

Six kinds of support

Most children need a mix. Start with what the family tells you, watch what helps, and adjust. Every child is different, including children who share a diagnosis.



Communication

Children who speak few words, use sign, pictures, or an AAC device, or need extra time to answer.

- Offer choices with pictures instead of open questions.
- Accept every kind of answer: pointing, signing, a device, a thumbs-up, or a smile.
- Program key words (God, love, me, friend) into AAC devices ahead of time. Ask the family.
- Wait 5-10 seconds for a response. Don't answer for them.



Sensory

Children who find noise, lights, touch, crowds, or smells overwhelming, or who seek extra movement and input.

- Offer noise-reducing headphones and a quieter seat near the edge.
- Give a heads-up before loud moments like music or cheering.
- Have a calm corner with soft items and fidgets.
- Offer alternatives to messy materials (stickers instead of glue, crayons instead of paint).



Motor

Children with low muscle tone, limited fine-motor control, or who use a wheelchair, walker, or other mobility equipment.

- Use chunky crayons, adaptive (loop) scissors, glue sticks, or glue dots.
- Pre-cut pieces or enlarge templates to 150%.
- Offer hand-under-hand help (your hand under theirs), and only when they want it.
- Plan every game so it can be played seated or rolling.



Attention & regulation

Children who need movement, get overwhelmed, struggle with transitions, or need breaks to stay calm and engaged.

- Show a visual schedule and point to it at every change.
- Give warnings: "2 more minutes, then craft." Use a timer they can see.
- Use First-Then: "First story, then game."
- Make breaks a normal part of the room, not a punishment.



Learning & processing

Children who learn at a different pace, need repetition, or understand more with concrete, hands-on examples.

- Use short sentences and one-step directions.
- Show, then tell. Model everything first.
- Repeat the one big idea often, in the same words.
- Use real objects and pictures alongside every story.



Vision & hearing

Children who are blind or have low vision, or who are Deaf or hard of hearing.

- Use large print, bold lines, and high contrast. Add tactile lines with puffy paint or wax sticks.
- Describe pictures and actions out loud.
- Face the child when you talk, and use visuals, signs, and captions.
- Seat them where they can see or hear best, and ask them where that is.

Down syndrome, autism, and more. Children with Down syndrome often benefit from visuals, hands-on learning, extra processing time, and motor supports. Autistic children often benefit from predictability, sensory supports, clear expectations, and respect for how they communicate. Some children are both. The supports in this guide work across all of these, so pick what fits the child in front of you.

FOR FAMILIES · PLEASE RETURN TO YOUR CHILD'S LEADER

All About Me

Help us welcome your child well. Share as much or as little as you like.

Photo or drawing
of me

My name is... / I like to be called...

I'm great at...

I love... (favorite things, shows, songs, toys)

How I communicate (words, signs, pictures, device, gestures)

Things that are hard for me (noises, textures, crowds, changes)

When I'm upset, it may look like...

Things that help me feel calm

Help I might need (bathroom, eating, moving, safety)

Words or language our family uses

Allergies, medical, or safety notes

Would a buddy help? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Let's try it OK to take photos of my child? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Feet/hands only
Parent/guardian: _____ Phone during service: _____

Kept private and shared only with your child's leaders.

PLAN IT

Session adaptation map

Every part of the session, with ready-made adaptations. Scan the column for the support the child needs.

PART	COMMUNICATION	SENSORY	MOTOR	ATTENTION & REGULATION	LEARNING
Welcome	Greet by name. Offer the “hi” card.	Quiet entrance and a seat near the edge.	Clear paths and space in the circle.	Show the schedule and point to “Story.”	Same welcome routine each week.
Lesson	Picture story panels. Accept pointing.	Mystery box: warn before opening. Let them peek first.	Child can open the box lid with a loop handle.	Short: 4 minutes. Fidget allowed.	Repeat: “God sees the heart.”
Verse	Picture strip + signs.	No loud parts required.	Motions seated or tiny.	Practice in short bursts.	Short verse: “God sees my heart.”
Craft	Choose picture stickers of good things.	Glue dots or stickers instead of glue.	Pre-cut, pre-folded flap. Big template.	Step cards and a visible timer.	Model each step first.
Game	Picture Heart Hunt cards.	Hunt in a small, quieter area.	Hearts at easy-reach height.	Pair with a buddy. Clear start/stop.	Show one found heart as an example.
Prayer & go	Pray card to point to.	Leave before the pickup rush if needed.	Hands on heart.	“All done” card.	Same closing each week.

VISION & HEARING, EVERY PART

Large print (enlarge pages to 150%), high-contrast bold lines, and describing pictures out loud. For children who are Deaf or hard of hearing: face them, use the verse signs and visuals, turn on captions for any video, and seat them where they can see your face and hands.

KEEP IT CALM & SAFE

When a child is overwhelmed

Big feelings are normal, and they usually mean a child needs something, like less noise, a break, or more time. Your calm is the most important support in the room.

WHEN A CHILD IS OVERWHELMED

1

Notice

Watch for early signs: covering ears, pacing, going quiet, or getting louder.

2

Reduce

Lower your voice, use fewer words, dim the noise. Move the group, not the child, if you can.

3

Offer

Show the break card or calm-down choices. Let them choose.

4

Wait

Give space and time. Don't ask questions or explain yet.

5

Reconnect

Welcome them back warmly, with no lecture. Returning is always the goal.

CALM CORNER CHECKLIST

- ☐ Beanbag, rug, or small pop-up tent
- ☐ Noise-reducing headphones (kid and adult sizes)
- ☐ Fidgets, squeeze balls, a weighted lap pad (if the family uses one)
- ☐ Picture books and the calm-down choices card
- ☐ Visible from the room, so a leader can always see the child

SAFETY & DIGNITY

- Never restrain or force a child to participate.
- Keep bathroom help private, and follow your church's two-adult policy.
- Know each child's allergies and medical plans.
- Share information about a child only with leaders who need it.

SET UP A SENSORY-FRIENDLY ROOM

- Turn off or dim buzzing lights. Use lamps or natural light if you can.
- Keep music and mic volume low, and warn before it starts.
- Clear clutter and keep walls calm, so there's less to take in.
- Use the same room setup every week.
- Mark a quiet exit path to the calm corner.

TALKING WITH FAMILIES AFTERWARD

- Start with something good: "She loved the craft!"
- Share what happened simply and privately, without blame.
- Say what helped, and ask what they'd suggest.
- Thank them. They trusted you with their child.
- Invite them back: "We can't wait to see him next week."

Behavior is communication. Rocking, flapping, humming, pacing, or chewing often help a child stay calm and focused, so there's no need to stop them. Step in only if someone could get hurt. Then tell the family what happened and what helped, kindly and privately.

ADAPTED LESSON

God Looks at the Heart

Tell the story of Samuel choosing David in five picture steps. Use the two mystery boxes, but give a heads-up first, since surprises can be hard for some children.

PLAIN-LANGUAGE STORY (READ SLOWLY, POINT TO EACH PICTURE)

1  God sent Samuel to find a king.	2  Samuel saw tall, strong brothers.	3  God said, "Not him."	4  Then came David, the youngest.	5  God said, "Yes! I see his heart."
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MAKE IT HANDS-ON

- Mystery boxes: say "I'm going to open it now" before each one. Let a child open it if they want.
- Give every child a paper heart to hold. They hold it up at "God sees the heart."
- Use seven small figures or cups for the brothers. Kids help count them.

IF... THEN TRY...

- If **surprises are hard**, show the child what's in each box ahead of time. They can be your "helper who knows the secret."
- If **counting is tricky**, count together on fingers, or just say "lots of brothers!"
- If a **child is non-speaking**, give them the heart card to hold up at the big moment.

ASK IT WITH CHOICES

- "Does God look at the outside or the heart?" (Point: eye or heart card.)
- "Is this box fancy or plain?"
- "Show me a kind heart!" (Hands make a heart.)

TEACHING MOVES THAT HELP EVERY LEARNER

- **One big idea**, said the same way every time
- **Show, then tell**: hold up the picture or object first
- **Pause** after each sentence and count to 5
- **Praise effort**: "You pointed to the right picture!"

ADAPTED PRAYER

Thank You, God, for seeing my heart. Help me be kind. Amen.

Children can pray by repeating, pointing to the pray card, signing, holding hands, or simply being present.

ADAPTED MEMORY VERSE

See it, sign it, say it

Use the short version with pictures and signs. Children can build up to the full verse over several weeks.

SHORT VERSE



God



sees



my



heart!

FULL VERSE: “MAN SEES THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE, BUT THE LORD SEES THE HEART.” 1 SAMUEL 16:7

KEY-WORD SIGNS (ASL)

God

Flat hand, fingers pointing up, starts above your head and moves down in front of your face

See

Two fingers (a V) start at your eyes and move forward

Heart

Tap your middle finger on your chest over your heart

Me / I

Point to your chest

Love

Cross your fists over your chest, like a hug

Friend

Hook index fingers together, then flip and hook again

Check a video dictionary (like Signing Savvy or HandSpeak) to see each sign. If the child already uses a sign system, follow the family.

EVERY WAY COUNTS

- Saying it or saying one word (“heart!”)
- Signing, or pointing to the pictures in order
- Pressing words on an AAC device
- Making a heart with hands

PRACTICE IDEAS

- Play “Heart hop”: step on a paper heart for each word. Seated kids can tap them.
- Put the picture strip on the craft table.
- Sing it to “Row, Row, Row Your Boat.”

ADAPTED CRAFT

God Sees My Heart, adapted

Every child can make the flap card. Use the picture sticker sheet (next page) so children can show what's in their heart without drawing or writing.

Level 1 • Full support

- Card is pre-cut and pre-folded.
- Child picks 2-3 picture stickers (love, share, help...) by pointing and places them in the heart with help.
- Adult writes the child's name.

Level 2 • Some support

- Pre-cut card. Child colors the "outside" person.
- Child cuts out and glues 3-4 picture stickers in the heart.
- Step cards show the order.

Level 3 • Standard or stretch

- Child cuts, folds, draws themselves, and writes words in the heart.
- Stretch: add a friend's name and a good thing about them.

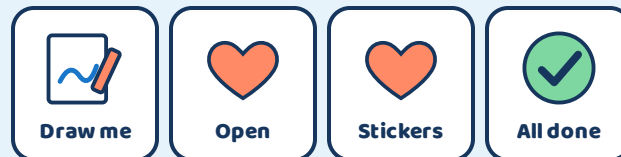
ADAPTIVE SUPPLIES

- ☐ Template enlarged to 150% for easier coloring
- ☐ Picture sticker sheet (next page), pre-cut for Level 1
- ☐ Glue dots or glue sticks (not liquid glue)
- ☐ Loop or spring-loaded scissors
- ☐ Chunky crayons and markers

SENSORY-FRIENDLY SWAPS

- Glue dots avoid sticky fingers.
- Let kids stand at the table if sitting is hard.
- A quieter table with fewer kids.

SHOW THE STEPS



Cut these out from the visual schedule page, or point to them here.

The process matters more than the product. A craft that's mostly stickers, or one that's finished with lots of help, still counts. So does a child who chooses to watch. Praise their choices ("You picked blue!"), not how neat it looks.

CRAFT PRINTABLE

Picture stickers: good things in my heart

Print on sticker paper, or on paper to cut and glue. Children choose which ones go in their heart.



Love



Sharing



Helping



Kindness



Friends



Joy



Praying



Hugs



Singing



Smiles



Saying hi



Cleaning up

ADAPTED ACTIVITY

Heart Hunt (adapted)

Use the picture-supported Heart Hunt cards so every child can “read” their kind action, and set the hunt up so no one gets overwhelmed.

SET IT UP FOR SUCCESS

- ☐ Print the **picture Heart Hunt cards** (after the sticker sheet).
- ☐ Hide hearts in a small area, at easy-reach heights, and some in plain sight.
- ☐ Show one found heart before starting.
- ☐ Clear start and stop signals: a bell, a light, or a hand signal.

IF... THEN TRY...

- If a child doesn't want to hunt, they can be the “basket keeper” who collects hearts.
- If waiting is hard, give each child their own hidden heart to find.
- If a kind action involves touch (hug, high-five), always offer a choice: wave or thumbs-up instead.

WAYS TO PLAY

- **Buddy pairs:** every child hunts with a friend.
- **Seated hunt:** hide hearts under cups on a table.
- **Wheelchair-friendly:** hearts at chair height along a clear path.
- **Low-sensory:** a small group hunts while others wait at the table.

JOBS ANYONE CAN CHOOSE



WAITING & TURN-TAKING SUPPORTS

- Show whose turn it is: pass a sock or a “my turn” card.
- Use the wait card with a visual timer.
- Keep groups small so turns come quickly.
- Give waiting kids a job: counting, cheering, or holding something.

CELEBRATE PARTICIPATION

- Praise trying, not winning.
- Every way of joining counts: watching, cheering, and choosing all count.
- End with a group cheer so everyone finishes together.
- Tell families one specific thing their child did well.

ACTIVITY PRINTABLE

Picture Heart Hunt cards

Cut apart and hide. Each card has a picture, so every child can “read” the kind action.



Wave to a friend



Smile at 3 friends



Clap for a friend



Say something kind



Help clean up



Sit by someone new



Give a hug (or a wave)



Pray for a friend



Invite someone to play



Cheer: You can do it!



Share with a friend



Say God loves you

PRINTABLE · VISUAL SUPPORTS

Today's schedule & First-Then board

Post the schedule where everyone can see it. Point to each step as you go, and turn it over or move it to “done” when it’s finished. Cut out cards to use on the First-Then board.



1



Hello

2



Story

3



Verse

4



Craft

5



Heart Hunt

6



Pray

7



Go home

FIRST

THEN

place a card here

place a card here

HOW TO USE FIRST-THEN

- Put the less-preferred activity in FIRST and a favorite in THEN.
- Say it simply: “First story, then game.”
- Point, wait, and follow through every time.
- Velcro dots on the back make cards easy to move.

TRANSITION TIPS

- Give a 2-minute warning with a visual timer.
- Hand the child the next card to carry to the next spot.
- Sing the same short clean-up or move song each time.

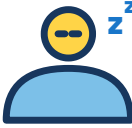
PRINTABLE · VISUAL SUPPORTS

Talk board, break cards & calm-down choices

Keep the talk board on the table or clipboard. Model it: point to the words as *you* talk. Laminate if you can.



 Yes	 No	 More	 All done
 Help	 Break	 Bathroom	 Drink
 Happy	 Sad	 Mad	 Worried
 God	 Love	 Friend	 Heart

 I need a break Hand this card to a leader	 I need help Hand this card to a leader
---	--

CALM-DOWN CHOICES

 Smell the flower, blow out the candle	 Squeeze a ball	 Headphones on
 Take a walk with a buddy	 Use a fidget	 Quiet corner

READ BEFORE CHURCH · SEND HOME AHEAD OF TIME

I Go to Church!

Read this with your child a few times before Sunday so they know what to expect.



Today I go to church.



My teacher says hi.



We hear a story about David.



God sees my heart!



I make a heart craft.



We look for hearts. I can hunt with a friend.



If I need a break, I can show my card.



Then I go home. God sees my heart!

ADAPTED TAKE-HOME

Picture verse cards & family note



God



sees



my



heart!

1 SAMUEL 16:7



God



sees



my



heart!

1 SAMUEL 16:7



God



sees



my



heart!

1 SAMUEL 16:7



God



sees



my



heart!

1 SAMUEL 16:7

FOR FAMILIES

Your child learned: God sees the heart

Today your child heard how God chose young David because He looks at the heart. We used pictures, signs, and a mystery box. Practice the picture verse at home, and look for kind things in each other's hearts this week.

PRACTICE AT HOME

- Say "God sees my heart" and point to each picture.
- Try the signs for **God**, **see**, and **heart**.
- At bedtime, name one kind thing your child did today.

SIGNS TO TRY

God

Flat hand, fingers pointing up, starts above your head and moves down in front of your face

See

Two fingers (a V) start at your eyes and move forward

Heart

Tap your middle finger on your chest over your heart

TELL US HOW IT WENT

What helped your child today? What should we try next time? Anything we should know?

Wear fun, mismatched socks on 3.21 and share a feet photo with [#Celebrate321](#). More free resources at [Celebrate321.org](#).