



Tips on Interacting with VIPs!!!

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. Remember that VIP Kids are not defined by their disability, VIP kids are just kids, with unique abilities!

- 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.
- When you are not sure what to say, just ask questions. If you feel your VIP may not be able to reply in full, ask questions that allow for "yes/no" answers.
- Be sure to talk directly to your VIP friend. 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 turn and ask their parent/caregiver to clarify.
- Try to include the person in whatever activity is available. Many times 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 asked a question you are unable to answer, please follow through until they get the assistance needed. The event volunteers in the Smile Team shirts are there to help or stop by a yellow Nathaniel's Hope tent for information.** 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 caring and sharing a little love.

Feel free to exchange information and keep in contact with your new friends!