

A sunset scene viewed from under a dark canopy. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright orange and yellow glow. The sun's reflection is visible on the water. In the foreground, the silhouettes of several people are visible, looking out towards the water. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

# Organizing a Respite Event

“Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give your rest.”

Matthew 11:28

# WHY??



- First of all- **You're here for a reason!**
- Did God give you a heart for these children and their families? Have you asked yourself, what more can you do with that passion?
- *"I was sick and you looked after me.... I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me. Matthew 25:36, 40 (NIV)*
- *"Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ." Galatians 6:2*
- *"For they gave me respite from labor and rested me and refreshed my spirit as well as yours..." 1 Corinthians 16:18*
- What is the definition of RESPITE?
- A short period of rest or relief from something difficult or **unpleasant\***
- [\\*https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4RAbxKSnF3c\\*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4RAbxKSnF3c)

Grace Nights

Come to **Me**  
all who are **I** weary  
and **I** will give you  
**rest**

Matt 12:28

- Why I am here? A desire of our ministry is to equip others. \*
- \*<https://vimeo.com/171587778>

# Beginning Tips...



- **First and foremost- seek God's will and timing.\***
- **Name your respite program.**
- **Start off small and slow (maybe just board games and a movie) \***
- **You don't have to have a creative bone in your body- Pinterest has great ideas! As your respite grows, your ideas will too! \***
- **Dream BIG, but build up to that dream to ensure success.**
- **Always have a theme- it's easier for planning!\* Accept suggestions, especially from the kids!**
- **Have respite night or ministry shirts for kids comfort- set an age for volunteer responsibilities.\***
- **Have activities and/or decorations that you are willing to scratch at the last minute.\***
- **Plan at least 2 months in advance- order your supplies in advance. Always check inventory first. It will help the creative juices flow and save you from duplicating supplies! Ask other ministries to share.**

# Tips Continued...

- **Do small tasks ahead of time and save the week of for things that have to wait: admin. Stuff, set up, perishable shopping, etc.**
- **Set yourself (the coordinator and implementer) up for success- not disappointment. Have set up and tear down tasks list and recruit help!!\***
- **DON'T give yourself tasks for the night! Have admin assistants. Be available to greet families, answer questions and direct volunteers. I learned the hard way! \***
- **Don't try to be your own photographer of the night. Get a semi-experienced volunteer assigned specifically to that. Allow for creativity, but call them when you see a cute moment.**
- **Find out your churches volunteer requirements and get those going as soon as they register. I learned the hard way! \***
- **Remember the higher purpose!\***

# Who is the respite event for?

- As the video stated, Grace Night was born out of a desire to give parents, raising children with special needs, a break. **Realizing that some children will not live independent lives**, we knew we had to have our program include **adults**. Grace Night is also open to **siblings**, so Mom and Dad can have a **true break**. **When you have older participants, consider having a special "hang-out" room for them. We do 13 and up! \***
- Yes, our Grace Nights were created to give the parents a rest! **BUT**, the kids and I know I make this night **ALL ABOUT THEM!** If or when you are able, **GO ALL OUT FOR THEM!!** It has been suggested that it is not necessary, and it's not, **BUT** I want them to know that **THEY ARE WORTH IT!!** It's **THEIR** night- the parents just think it's for them.

*Shhhh*  
IT'S A SECRET



# Structure:

- Each Grace Night is structured roughly the same, so the participants know what to expect (set up, schedule, stations, etc.) However, there is also a theme for each Grace Night which adds a new dimension and a special event throughout the night. \*

- **Theme Ideas:**

- Olympics
- Princesses and Super Heroes
- Carnival
- Therapy Animals “Meet and Greet”
- Mini Nutcracker Performance
- Valentine’s Day
- Beach
- Block Party
- Candy Land
- Polar Express





## Dinner:

- **Food:** We provide Chick-fil-a. However, we understand each church's budget is different. Some prefer to not feed the children or while others have them bring their own supper. Other respite programs serve different foods each time.
- Chick-fil-a has been a great solution for us. We can meet dietary restrictions (gluten free) and it makes everyone happy! We only buy the entrée choices (nuggets or sandwich -either can be grilled - and salad). Then we add chips, fruit and a dessert (always having a gluten free option as well- we use *Enjoy Life* brand of G- free cookies)
- During summer months, especially when it fit our theme, we have had Snow cones. You can order Dye- free syrup from Amazon (way in advance) or invite our your own Snow cone truck! HUGE HIT!\*
- Learn which sauces/dressings are popular. They like to send as little as they can on those.\*
- Chick-fil-a delivers if you're in their delivery range!\*
- Color coded wrist bands with instructions \*





# Parent testimony...

- “We love the Grace nights. It provides a scheduled time for us to get out and enjoy some time as a couple or with Hayden (her older brother.) Harper loves it and feels safe and comfortable there and the buddies do a great job. **One of the best times was when there was a special snow cone truck that even had allergy friendly choices with no food dyes.** She really loves it all and it is a great program. Our family feels so supported by our church and this program has been a huge blessing to us.”

# Registration:

- Registration is always free but **required**- for participants, as well as volunteers. We use our Fellowship One weblink to create the registration form. That is where we ask all questions about special needs, food/ drink choices, allergies, etc.\*
- Always have extra volunteers for floaters and last minute fill-in. Accept all that want to come (unless it is extremely disproportioned.) They will get the experience, fall in-love, and then come back when you really need them!\*
- For registration to be complete, it is necessary for a child profile form to be on file for all children with special needs. From this parent based questionnaire, we can provide the buddy the information they need to have a successful night with the participant.\* As well as a section with permissions and authorizations for pictures, medical care, and parent signatures.

# Volunteer jobs:

**1. One on one participant buddy\***

**2. Sibling group leaders (3-5 kids grouped by age and gender)\***

**3. Preschool or Dedicated room\***

✓ 1 for younger siblings

✓ 1 for fragile participants (one on one)

**4. Station leaders**

✓ every room should have a volunteer to assist with the 2 volunteer protocol.

**5. Food prep, serving and clean up**

✓ I allow my usual lead kitchen volunteers to create their own system, for comfort. (Delegate, Delegate, Delegate!!!)

✓ Assign extra middle school volunteers to help with clean up\*

**6. Administrative help (check in, extra bathroom help, preschool room dinner time, check out, relieving buddies, assistance with difficult children, etc.**

**7. Floaters and fill-ins**

**\*Due to these needs, my number of volunteers are usually equal to or more than the number of participants!!!**

• Our biggest one, so far, was in December of 2017- we had 60 participants and 70 volunteers. We did have some middle school volunteers that were just playmates- so we could have probably made it with 60/65. The need adds up quick!!

# Protocols and Procedures:

- It is **VERY** important to have these in place!!
- Check with your church's policy and emergency plans and add specifics for the safety of you respite event!
- Have PLENTY of walkie-talkie radios. We have one in each room/station as well as 2 admin staff with them.
- **Things you need procedures for:**
  1. Bathroom protocol\*
  2. Loners: *(A few of our older siblings will not have buddies; but most will be with a volunteer at all times. Our rule of thumb\*)*
  3. *Medical Emergency- we always make sure to have an RN on campus (she's one of our volunteers)*
  4. *Fire Alarm- DON'T PANIC!! Again, I learned the hard way!\**
  5. *Violent and aggressive behavior\**

# Structure of our night...



1. Set up begins the day of ASAP. (We wait for GCA to dismiss)
  - ✓ *This is where your set up list is very important, as volunteers help with regular set up, you focus on themed decorations (as you have envisioned them) and admin tasks. \**
2. Volunteer meeting before families arrive. Go over schedule and protocols. \*
3. Pre- print or fill out name tags and dinner wrist bands for quick check-in. \*
4. Volunteers stand with child greeting signs to show who to go to. \*
  - ✓ *I advise to have a volunteer watching for escaped children without their assigned buddy. (Especially your church members) and with children who have late arriving buddies. \**
5. Welcome families. As soon as child is paired with buddy they are free to go to stations. \*
6. Free play in stations until dinner is ready.
7. While we are up close to our group picture area, we go ahead and do that before everyone is tired. \*

## 8. Chick-fil-a dinner!!

- ✓ *Since our dinner area is away from our stations, the 2 volunteer protocol applies when returning to stations.\**
- ✓ *Depending on the age and ability of our pre-school class, we usually deliver dinner to their room (so they can eat at a small table) and relieve volunteers to go fix their plate.*

## 9. After dinner is when we do any special themed event (train ride, special ceremony, camp-fire sing along, movie, dance party, etc.)

- ✓ *Some events you may want to do in groups and not all together.*

## 10. After themed event, everyone returns to stations for free-play until dismissal

# Final thoughts...

- Towards the end of the night, you will see some sweet moments of the kids and volunteers just hanging out and relaxing. Watch for those and listen for the stories of the night. This is the intimate time.
- They will be tired!!!
- Since we run until 9:00, there are a few that begin to have melt-downs. Ask parents if this may be the case, or watch for it during each event. I have instructed the buddies of these particular kiddos and set up a routine to mimic their wind-down time at home.
- ✓ Special snacks
- ✓ iPad with video
- ✓ Special blanket or stuffed animal
- ✓ Changing into P.J.s
- Have specific check-out system\*
- Instruct buddies to share at least one special story about the child's night
- Ask parent's how their night was- it means a lot!!
- Hand out any special parting gifts and remind them to get their goodie bags.

