

## Special Buddies Program FAQs

**Q: Is this just some kind of babysitting?**

A: No. We will be providing a regular program, including Bible lessons, music, arts and crafts, and fellowship.

**Q: What formats will be provided? Will all of the children be in one big room, regardless of age and ability?**

A: This answer depends to some degree on the individual needs of the children who register. In its original form, the plan is as follows:

**Self-contained/Reverse Inclusion model** – Children with special needs who are best served apart from the children's program will be in one of the SBP rooms for the entire conference. Reverse inclusion means that typically-developing peers will come to the SBP room for interaction with the SBP children within the structure of the SBP schedule of activities. Self-contained children will only leave the room, supervised, for restroom breaks or at lunch when released to a parent. Teens from the Teen Staff Program may be a part of the volunteer staff, but trained adults as well as the THSC Special Buddies Staff will always be available for supervision.

**Medically Fragile** – Children who are medically fragile will be served in a self-contained room designated for their care. The room will have the Director of Special Buddies, at least one staff member with medical knowledge, as well as volunteer staff. Teens from the Teen Staff Program may be in the room at times to serve as volunteers, but other children will not be in the room, in order to avoid the possibility of inadvertent spontaneous behavior that could put the medically fragile children at risk for injury. THSC Special Buddies Staff will not administer any medications or perform any medical procedures unless it falls under "The Good Samaritan Rule". For more information, please contact us at [specialneeds@thsc.org](mailto:specialneeds@thsc.org). Caregivers will be asked to return to the room to take care of those needs THSC is unable to execute. The THSC Special Buddies Staff will be available for suctioning and for monitoring medical needs such as seizure activity until the Caregivers and/or Medical Providers arrive. Refrigeration will be available for medications and feeding products, if necessary. Parents will be able to remain in the room during the lunch hour in order to feed their child.

**Q: My child requires electrical outlets for his/her monitoring devices. Will those be available?**

A: Yes.

**Q: How will the SBP staff know if there is a need in another room for extra help?**

A: Leslie Stevens is the Director of the SB Program. In each room, one Special Buddies Staff Volunteer will be designated as the room leader, and another will be the teacher for the lessons. The room leader's role is to oversee the general welfare of the children. Each room will have the ability to have instant communication with Leslie and can contact Leslie for assistance.

**Q: How will I know if you need me?**

A: Parents will be required to give the SBP leaders a cell phone number for a phone that will be on for the duration of the conference. Please set your phone to *Vibrate* if you attend a workshop. Should the SBP staff need you, they will call your cell phone.

**Q: What will lunch time look like?**

A: We need to be sensitive to the needs of our volunteer staff. Please pick up your child promptly at the time designated in the conference brochure for pick-up of children. If you prefer to bring a lunch instead of going somewhere, limited refrigeration is available in one of the rooms. You may store your lunch there and then eat with your child in the SBP rooms. However, staff will not be available during lunch. Please also consider that your child will be in that room all day and might benefit from a short walk to another area of the building or even outside.

**Q: What materials will be used for the lessons and activities?**

A: The SBP has a 5 Year Scope and Sequence that is available on request.

**Q: My child is over the age of 12, which is the cut-off age for the children's program. Can he/she participate in the Special Buddies Program?**

A: There is no age limit for the Special Buddies Program. SBP will be using both reverse inclusion and Teen Staff volunteers. That way, teens in the SBP will have interaction with typical peers during the course of the conference. Participants over the age of 12 will consult with Leslie Stevens regarding the ability to participate in the children's program or Teen Staff Program. Determinations are made on a case by case basis.

**Q: Who will staff the SBP rooms?**

A: Leslie Stevens is the ***Special Needs Consultant for THSC***. She and her husband, George, as well as the Special Buddies Volunteer Staff have been serving in the Special Buddies Program at THSC since its inception in 2008. Leslie was the Director of the Special Needs Ministry for her home church, Grace Community Church, in Lindale, Texas, from December of 2005 to December of 2013. Leslie resigned her position in order to be home with her daughter, Kirsten. Kirsten has the dual diagnosis of Down syndrome and Autism and is deemed Medically Fragile. She has received extensive training throughout the years by various Special Needs Ministries and organizations in overseeing special needs ministries in large-group settings. The rooms will also be staffed by volunteers trained and screened by THSC.

**Q: What kind of training will the staff have?**

A: Although most of the volunteers will have previous experience with special needs children, on Thursday afternoon, the SBP staff will assemble for training aimed specifically at being prepared for the conference and the children who will be in the program. This training will be led by Leslie Stevens. Specific needs may be addressed by other knowledgeable individuals, such as training by individuals with medical knowledge for those who will work with medically fragile children. Knowing in advance the detailed information that the registration form requests will help the trainers prepare the staff for meeting the needs of your child. This is one reason why pre-registration is mandatory.

**Q: Can we meet the people who will work with our child in advance?**

A: Yes! THSC will host an open house Thursday afternoon, prior to the Thursday Evening General Sessions, in the area of the Convention Center where the SBP will meet. You are encouraged to come to this event to meet the staff, ask questions, and bring supplies that your child may need, as well as special items that might help your child transition easier the next morning.

We encourage you to consider attending this event. Bringing supplies in advance will help your morning go smoother. Bringing familiar items in advance will help your child feel secure the next day. And, of course, meeting the staff is important, for both you and your child, so that your child is not left with a stranger in the morning, and so you can give specific instructions to the individual who is assigned to your child.

Another advantage to coming Thursday night is that THSC will have YOUR REGISTRATION MATERIALS (lanyard, program, bag, etc.) available on request. This allows you to avoid the lines at the Registration Booth downstairs!! Doing this on Thursday will make your Friday transition smoother – you can drop your child and head straight for the exhibit hall or workshop of your choice without having to stand in line!

**Q: What will the staff-to-child ratio be?**

A: In a perfect world, if we have as many volunteers as we believe we will have, the ratio should be one-to-one. Of course, medically fragile children will have priority for that ratio, as will Runners! The Director and SB Volunteer Staff will not be part of the one-to-one ratio. They will be available for all of the SBP children inside the rooms. Children who are higher functioning may not require a 1:1 ratio. Adults who are designated as room leaders and teachers will not be assigned to individual children, so there may actually be better than a one-to-one ratio.

**Q: Can I leave my child in the SBP so I can attend the evening events?**

A: We regret that we cannot offer evening care for the children in the SBP. We need to be sensitive to the volunteers' schedules and not overextend their energies.

**Q: Will the leaders' children be participating in the SBP?**

A: That depends on space availability. Though the Stevens do have a child with special needs, they also have other care arrangements available to them. Our goal is to provide options for families who would not be able to attend, ahead of taking care of our own child. So, if space is available, our child may attend, but she will not if we need the space for other children.

**Q: Why do I have to fill out a special registration form for this program, apart from the regular THSC registration?**

A: There are two reasons for the special form. First, the SBP Leadership will review the forms to screen for children who would fit best in each of the offered programs – or perhaps, would fit better in the children's program. Second, the staff needs to be very familiar with your child's needs in order to prepare to give your family the best possible situation for the weekend. We hope to avoid meltdowns caused by uncertainty, and to give you the very best experience at the conference. The more we know in advance, the better we can serve your family. We want to be able to set your child up for a successful experience in the SBP.

**Q: Why do you want a picture of my child?**

A: We want the volunteers to see them in advance, so they can recognize the children when you visit on Thursday. Greeting the child by name is important to us. Personal photos are used for internal purposes only.

**Q: How many children can participate in SBP?**

A: We are basing the limits on square footage of the rooms available for us to use. As the plan stands right now, we have space for approximately 25 individuals with special needs, depending on the unique needs of those who register. Please understand, though, that at some point we will have to cut off the registration, so get your forms in as quickly as possible in order to secure your child's spot in the SBP.

**Q: I am not sure if I can attend or if I will bring my child. Should I just wait until the day I show up to bring my child?**

A: We will not be able to accommodate any walk-up registrants at the conference. All participants in the SBP MUST be pre-registered.

**Q: I am not sure if we will bring our child. Should I register and then back out at the conference if we decide not to bring him/her?**

A: Well, of course there is nothing we could do to stop you from doing this. However, since you are the parent of a child with special needs, you know how very difficult attending an event like this can be, and how much planning and effort it takes to prepare. If you reserve a space that you really have no intention of filling, you have taken from another family the opportunity to attend. While we understand that emergencies occur, we do ask that you not reserve a spot "just in case". Please go ahead and make your plans. We urge you to carefully consider the impact that your decision might have on everyone involved, including the family we might have to turn away. Also remember that there will be no refunds after the appointed date determined by THSC.

**Q: Will there be a waiting list?**

A: In the event that the spaces fill up, yes, we will maintain a waiting list. However, we respect your need to plan and will not call you at the very last minute unless you tell us that is okay.

**Q: What if we register and then cannot attend?**

A: Please let us know as soon as possible if you will not be able to attend, so another family can be accommodated. Refunds requested in writing before the specified date by THSC will be issued minus ten percent. There will be no refunds after the appointed date determined by THSC.

**Q: What security measures will be in place?**

A: Participants in the SBP will receive a t-shirt with a special SBP logo on it. We ask that your child wear his SBP t-shirt both days of the conference. This will help the staff identify a child quickly in a crowd, if necessary. You will receive some type of identification at the time that you check your child in to his/her SBP room. You will be required to present that identification in order to pick up your child. If someone else will have permission to pick the child up, please be sure that Leslie Stevens knows that. The ALERT Cadets are stationed outside the Special Buddies Room for the duration of the Convention, and only caregivers with the approved identification and authorized personnel are allowed in the SB Area.

**Q: What will you do in case of emergency?**

A: We have been very careful to create a plan for different contingencies. We have already verified that the hotel has a back-up generator, so if your child requires monitoring with electrical equipment, a power outage would not put him/her in danger. We have also carefully designed an evacuation plan for worst-case scenarios, particularly in the event of a fire. We will go over this with you at the orientation meeting on Thursday night. We have a plan in place for children in wheelchairs to be evacuated in their chairs, regardless of which plan we use. Please let us know if loud noises like fire alarms frighten your child. We need to know that. We plan to use a picture schedule/scenario to help the children understand in the event that we need to change what we are doing. Please do not go against the flow of evacuation traffic in order to come to the SBP rooms. By the time you arrived, we will already be in a secure location. ALERT will assist the THSC Special Buddies Staff in evacuating in the event of an emergency.