



Welcome and include those with additional needs

We openly speak of the Church being a place where all are welcome and belong, but are we truly doing this as effectively as we could? Many church congregations are welcoming children and young people with a range of additional needs. This guide does not give you all the answers, but will allow you to think a bit more carefully about your church welcomes, includes and engages with those who have additional needs. The points that follow have been informed by the work of the Additional Needs Alliance and the Messy Church SEND resource.

WELCOME

1. Welcome every member of the family, whether or not they have additional needs.
2. Look beyond the disability and see the child, teen or adult. Enjoy the uniqueness of each person and look for Jesus in them.
3. Speak directly to the child or young person, as well as their carer. If possible, go down to their height level, especially if they are in a wheelchair.
4. Build a relationship with parent(s)/carer(s) – sensitively seek advice from the parent(s)/carer(s). Ask them how you can best offer assistance, support and allow their child/young person to fully belong to your church family. Any assistance should be offered, not forced.
5. Understand each child/young person and their individual needs, ensure you have an appropriate strategy for each child. Where possible, consider one-to-one support.
6. Consider appointing a Special Educational Needs and Disability Needs Co-ordinator (SENDCO) for your church.
7. Be accommodating of what you may consider to be unusual behaviour or noises. Allow children, young people and their parent(s)/carer(s) the opportunity to voice their opinions/preferences as much as they are able. Allow time and space for a personal response if you have asked a question.
8. It is important to be discreet and confidential about all families.

ENGAGEMENT

1. Use a picture timetable – this is a great inclusive resource for those children and young people who like routine and who like to know what activities are happening and the order in which they are taking place. Picture timetables can also serve as a great communication tool for those who are non-verbal or who have limited speech.



2. Keep your language simple, clear and concise. Also, try not say things like 'in a minute', for some children, often those on the autism spectrum, they take things very literally and statements such as this can be difficult for them to understand.
3. Use a multi-sensory approach to help children and young people for whom language is a challenge. Multi-sensory activities are often well received by all children and young people.
4. Put one idea across in several different ways, as we all process information differently.
5. Be aware that some children and young people are hyper-sensitive to noise, places, smells etc especially if they occur suddenly and without warning.
6. Try to ensure that children and young people with additional needs get the same opportunities as their peers (they may not be as quick to come forward, although wanting to). Consider providing additional support to enable children and young people to access the activities more fully, rather than taking over an activity for somebody with additional needs.
7. Consider having 'fiddle boxes' available.



8. Find out what the children and young people enjoy doing and try to find ways of linking it to what you are doing.

Most importantly, remember these three things:

- Be observant
- Be patient
- PRAY

Places to go for further advice and resources:

- Additional Needs Alliance: <http://additionalneedsalliance.org.uk/>
- Urban Saints, Additional Needs: <https://www.urbansaints.org/additionalneeds>
- A useful tool for aiding discussion produced by the Methodist Church called '10 Ways to Belong': <https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/10155/10-ways-to-belong-0119.pdf>
- Resources to help you best serve those with additional needs can be found here: <http://aslan.tonbridgebaptist.church/>

For any further advice or help, contact your Archdeaconry based Go Team Adviser:

<https://www.bathandwells.org.uk/ministry/children-young-people/>

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