

CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES RESOURCES FOR CHURCHES

Around 1 in 20 children in the UK have some form of disability. As many as one in five have some kind of additional need. This means there are disabled children in all our parishes and communities and often our households.

Church can be a scary place for families who include children with disabilities/additional needs, but there are lots of things you can do to make church a safe and welcoming place for children and their families.

Simple things you can do:

Be child-friendly!

Children with disabilities are first and foremost children. If your community looks like a place where children are welcome, it is much more likely that children with additional needs will feel welcome. A children's area with colour and a soft space on the floor will serve as a good indication that children are welcome.

Make accessibility a priority on your online spaces

More people than ever scope out your church online before entering your building. This is especially true of families with children with additional needs/disabilities. If you welcome all children regardless of disability, say so on your website and list any additional provision available. Give detailed information about services and activities. It can help children with additional needs to know what to expect. Brief descriptions of services as well as how long they last can really help.

Kindness and understanding

Families with children with additional needs, and often children themselves, are very aware of being judged or stared at. Children with additional needs may not be able to conform to the way things are usually done in church. The attitude of your congregation will be one of the biggest factors in families'

experience of church. Kindness and understanding go a long way. Teaching and training for congregations can help in supporting this.

Welcome the whole family

When welcoming families with children with additional needs, don't leave anyone out. Be sure to welcome each person even if they can't always respond in conventional ways. Welcome parents, carers, children, siblings, everyone in the family as you would anybody else. (You would be amazed how many times nobody speaks to somebody in a wheelchair or only speaks to the child with additional needs ignoring siblings or others with them.)

Tell people if things are going to change

Communicating change well is important for children with additional needs. If the things that usually happen are going to change tell people in advance. This will help families prepare and reassure children or opt out if it is going to be too challenging. This may be the style of service, the time, the children's work, or changes for seasons or special services.

Ask the experts!

The best people to ask about how to make church more accessible are often the children and families themselves. This could be anything from printing services on a different colour paper or having a safe space to chill out when things get noisy. Simple things can make a big difference. Be willing to ask, 'Is there anything we can do to help make church easier/more accessible for you?' and listen to the answer!

Toilets

Children with additional needs may need more assistance than their peers in using toilets. Keep disabled toilets free from clutter so there is space to use them properly. Signs such as 'Not all disabilities are visible' on the doors of disabled toilets can really help people with hidden disabilities feel welcome and included. Some children may require disabled changing facilities. These are different from baby changing facilities as children are older (and heavier). Think about a clean, private place a large changing mat could be used and purchase

one if possible. Or, even better, look at installing a changing places toilet facility. This will make it very clear to your community that disabled people are wanted and valued.

For more information about disabled changing facilities check out <http://www.changing-places.org>

ORGANISATIONS THAT OFFER INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

Through the roof

<https://www.throughtheroof.org>

Through the roof aims to:

Provide life-changing opportunities for disabled people • Equip churches and the Christian community to fully involve disabled people The website also includes information about obtaining funding

<https://www.throughtheroof.org/obtaining-funding-to-make-disability-related-improvements/>

<https://youtu.be/DVImnMXsU-M>

<https://www.message.org.uk/category/enable/>

Enable

Enable seeks to help people with seen or unseen disabilities connect with God Urban Saints Additional Needs Ministry

<https://www.urbansaints.org/campaign/additionalneeds>

The aim of our Additional Needs Ministry is to encourage, enable and equip children's, youth and families' workers to reach, include, create belonging for, and disciple all children and young people, especially those with additional needs or disabilities.

NIRV Accessible Bible

<https://www.biblicaeurope.com/our-work/the-accessible-bible>

The New International Reader's Version aims to make the Bible clear, understandable and easy to read, with shorter sentences and simpler language. The NIV Accessible Edition breaks down many barriers to reading, opening up the text to even more people who wish to read it.

Introductory reading...

Making Church Accessible to All: Including disabled people in church life by
Tony Phelps-Jones