**How to support Children and Young People with Additional Needs**

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**Background**

Many of our churches have children and young people with additional needs as part of their regular congregations and activities. We are also likely to have others visit or join in with occasional events. Often these extra needs are not obvious, so it is important we consider how we can be intentionally welcoming and inclusive all the time.

It is hard to navigate the right path through this sometimes difficult and complex area; being caring, inclusive and supportive to each child (and their families), while not losing focus on the needs of the rest of the group.

You will not be able to be an expert in every case but there are many simple things you can put in place which will make church more accessible to these children and young people.

We have found some ideas and tips which you may find helpful.

There are many great organisations that can give specific and detailed advice on particular needs and there are details of some of them below.

Many churches have already faced these issues and found solutions. Ask the CYP team to put you in touch.

**Training**

As you move towards being more inclusive think about whether training would be helpful. The ***'All Inclusive?’*** from Urban Saints is a good starting point as they offer a variety of seminars. The ***Accessibility, inclusion and belonging for all*** is particularly good as a starting point. Sharing some different needs and disabilities and ways to improve inclusion for those children and their families. This is run on a weekday evening and can be tailored to a particular church’s need.

Yours will not be the only church who would benefit from this, consider running it for all the churches in your local area. Or ask your CYP Team to help organise it.

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

**Team Lead/ Champion**

Is there one person who feels this to be an essential part of their ministry to C&YP? Encourage them to be involved in considering every area of church ministry. Support them, resource them and ensure the congregation know the vital role they are fulfilling.

As a champion they will be able to join dots and see the wider picture so helping your church be more inclusive.

**Ideas to help everyone feel welcomed**

* If you are looking to encourage families to join your church, make sure your website has some reference to C&YP with additional needs. A simple line that they are welcome and who to speak with to enable the child to best access what you provide.
* Have a leaflet available. If it includes C&YP ministry as a whole have a section on Additional Needs or provide a separate leaflet with more detail on how you want to support each child. Ask the CYP team for a sample.
* Welcome the whole family. Ask parents about a child’s preferences or needs – they are the expert in their child. Consider siblings and welcoming them intentionally, rather than simply part of the family.
* Treat each C or YP as an individual and encourage them to make choices for themselves wherever possible. Each will have different interests and abilities.
* Work towards every child having the same opportunities – some will be slower at coming forward than others.
* Consider having a volunteer supporting a C or YP while they are in church. They do not need to be an expert, simply willing to learn from the C or YP and the family.
* Find ways for the C or YP to take on a role within the church family, possibly welcoming, the collection or offering biscuits after the service.

**Ideas for worship**

* C&YP with additional needs often find a regular pattern helpful so they know what to expect.
* Consider offering an Order of Service with visual clues to enable engagement with the service. Ask the Diocesan CYP team for a sample.
* Bags with pictures or props are another way of having the parts of the service in a more tactile way that a C or YP can better interact with.
* Introduce each section of the service clearly so they will be able to cope with louder sounds, different smells etc.
* Consider the accessibility of the language you use in worship – look at Rachel Turner’s video for some advice on this. <https://www.parentingforfaith.brf.org.uk/post/framing-in-a-church-service/>
* Have a space where the family can sit which has resources suitable for all children. Ask the families for more ideas to help their C or YP’s specific needs.A sensory box may be helpful – ask the Diocesan CYP team for examples.

**Ideas for Groups**

* Again a regular routine and visual timetable can be very helpful.
* Consistency – treat all the children in a group the same. The team needs the same values and approach, so the children know their boundaries.
* Aim to give instructions one at a time and make tasks brief. Consider adapting activities so that all the children can be included.
* Minimise stimuli in your space – think of noise, lights, visual stimulation, scents and colours. If they may get too much for a child offer a quiet space in the room. It could have cushions, soft toys, books and can be accessed anytime without asking.
* Use multisensory activities as some children find some uncomfortable. Aim to include a variety of learning styles.

**Organisations with resources**

**Additional Needs Alliance** –help churches to include, support, create places of belonging for, and spiritually grow children, young people and young adults with additional needs or disabilities. They offer training for specific situations as well as sessions on Spirituality faith and children with additional needs amongst others.

<https://additionalneedsalliance.org.uk/>

**New-Wine.org** host networking meetings and run an annual national training day. They can also offer local or regional training days to provide more specific support as you look to support those with additional needs. (email [info@new-wine.org](mailto:info@new-wine.org) for details).

Messy Church has **Maximising the Mess** guide to help you welcome those with additional needs. <https://www.messychurch.org.uk/resource/how-do-we-welcome-people-additional-needs-messy-church>

**Churches with Additional Needs Ministry**

**All Belong**. Is a website from St Saviour’s Guildford which has been designed to share and has some of the resources they have used over the last 10+ years in running a special needs ministry. “We feel that this is a vitally important work if the church is to become a place where **all** are welcome, **all belong** and **all** can experience the love of God - and contribute together to be the body of Christ. Please feel free to download and amend the ideas to suit you - your church, your organisation, and most importantly, your children. As with all ministries, there's no right way to present God's truths, but we hope that you will find the resources helpful.”

<http://www.allbelong.co.uk/>

**City Gates Church London** – they have a special needs ministry to support children and young people in their faith. They write a Jesus Plan for each child with their and their parents help. They provide differentiated teaching, small groups, quiet environments, training for leaders and adapt their environment. Whilst some of what they do may not be possible for your church it gives a helpful idea of what can be achieved.

<https://www.citygates.london/get-connected/special-needs/>

**Aslan** is a ministry of Tonbridge Baptist church where they have been running an Aslan group since 2013. They have put together a website with information and resources freely available for anyone interested in providing an alternative Sunday School experience for 5-19 year olds with special needs.

<http://aslan.tonbridgebaptist.church/>

**Support for Parents**

**Care For the Family** offers a befriending service for parents of children with special needs. They also train people to run **Positive Parenting** courses. There is a generic course for parents of children with additional needs and specific ones on ASD and ADHD. They also have information about other support on their website.

<https://www.careforthefamily.org.uk/family-life/parent-support/parenting-additional-challenges/additional-needs-support>

**ASD Specific Support**

**Welcoming and including autistic people in our churches and communities**. A booklet produced by the Diocese of Oxford with lots of great ideas for children and young people as well as adults.

<https://www.oxford.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Autism-Guidelines-2019.pdf>

**Included by Grace** is a blog by an autism specialist teacher, trainer and author. Has thoughts, tips and ideas about including children, young people and adults with additional needs in churches.

[www.includedbygrace.wordpress.com](http://www.includedbygrace.wordpress.com)

**Include Autism** is a practical guide from Ambitious about Autism with info and resources to help understanding and encourage inclusion. It has a section on youth groups.

<https://www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk/what-we-do/awareness/include-autism-campaign>

**Christianity** had an excellent article explaining how church can feel to those with ASD, ADHD and how to make it more accessible.

<https://www.premierchristianity.com/home/17-ways-to-make-your-church-autism-friendly/184.article>

**The Autistic Society** also has helpful information <https://www.autism.org.uk/>

**Resources to help with inclusion**

**Children in Church?** Is a guide for people with responsibility for children’s work in churches who have those with additional needs, and includes topics such as making people feel welcome, making people feel included and ideas for teaching and worship.

<https://www.oxford.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/children_in_church_resource.pdf>

**Guidelines for accessible and inclusive ministry**. A very helpful resource from St Johns College Nottingham on how to make your church and ministry accessible for those with disabilities, both child and adult.

<https://www.stalbans.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/downloads/youth/inclusiveministryguideforchurches.pdf>

The **Methodist Church** has **Supporting Children with Special Needs** - a downloadable resource with tips on how to support children with special needs. They also have a helpful list of other agencies. <https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/children-youth-family-ministry/the-well-learning-hub-equipping-and-supporting-workers/resources-from-the-well-to-download/emotional-and-mental-wellbeing/supporting-children-with-special-needs/>

**General Church Inclusion**

**Churches For All.org.uk** is a network of UK Christian disability engaged organisations. They offer The Enabling Church Course to help share the inclusion message in your parish. There are also specific pages on ASD, Dementia & Dyslexia.

https://churchesforall.org.uk/enablingchurch/ecc/

**Count Everyone In** has a website with resources, blog and training available to equip the church to be welcoming and accessible to all. Particularly aimed at including adults with learning difficulties.

https://www.counteveryonein.org.uk/

**Through The Roof.org** is an organisation committed to helping churches include fully those with disabilities. They have a toolkit to help churches address inclusion throughout their ministries.

They have put together a session to help children and young people understand inclusion. <https://www.throughtheroof.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2015/08/Lasting-Values.pdf>

**Luke 5 Award for Christian Disability Inclusion**celebrates the difference made when barriers are broken down and disabled people are welcomed and fully included in Christian life. It is a way for those with disabilities to nominate a church or individual, to recognise the difference they have made when steps have been taken to bring about full inclusion. We want to celebrate the difference this makes, and by doing so encourage other churches and ministries to see the great positives brought about through true disability inclusion.