

How to support Children and Young People with Additional Needs

July 24



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, young people and their often anxious adults.

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 accessing training.

For a simple introduction Parenting for Faith has put together a short video to use with your children's or youth team.

Including everyone – SEN inclusion in church children's and youth groups

[SEN Inclusion](#)

The '**All Inclusive?**' from Urban Saints is a good follow on as they offer 6 seminars on a variety of topics; many available online.

Sharing some different needs and disabilities and ways to improve inclusion for those children and their families.

If you would prefer face to face training it can be 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.



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Ideas to help everyone feel welcomed

- 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 as part of the family. It is easy for sibling's to be unintentionally overlooked in these situations.
- 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.
- Treat each child or young person 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 particular volunteer (or a small group) supporting a child or young person while they are in church. They do not need to be an expert, simply willing to learn from the child or young person and the family.
- Find ways for the child or young person to take on a role within the church family, possibly welcoming, the collection or offering biscuits after the service.
- When you feel your church is able to support these families well, make sure your website has some reference to children and young people 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.

Ideas for worship

- Make sure your Welcome Team is well briefed to be a welcoming face to these families and help them access any resources available.
- Children and young people with additional needs often find a regular pattern helpful so they know what to expect.
- Have an Order of Service with visual clues to enable engagement with the service. Make them clearly visible on arrival- maybe have a copy on the church door. 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 child or young person 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. [Here](#)
- Have a space where the family can sit which has resources suitable for all children. Ask the families for more ideas to help their child or young person's specific needs.



- A sensory box may be helpful – ask the Diocesan CYP team for examples.

Ideas for Groups

- Having a regular routine and visual timetable can be very helpful. Using a Now and Next board can help with transitions between activities as will a clear countdown to finish.
- Consider the needs of each child in the group. Rephrase, adapt or simplify activities and approaches to allow all children to participate at whichever level they can.
- Aim to give instructions one at a time, repeat them using the same clear language and make tasks brief. End each task on a success; they don't need to complete a task to feel achievement. Allow a child to move on when they have had enough, giving praise for what they have achieved.
- Consider the needs of each child when starting an activity as where they sit can make a difference to their ability to engage. For example if a child has ASD or ADHD have an adult alongside them to help them engage with a task. For children with vision or hearing impairment sitting opposite can be helpful and for those children who can be unpredictable sit an adult between them and other children.
- Minimise stimuli in your space – think of noise, lights, visual stimulation, scents and colours. If a child gets overwhelmed at these offer a quiet space in the room. It could have cushions, soft toys, books and can be accessed anytime without asking (rather than treating it as 'time out' space).
- Use a variety of sensory activities as some children find some easier to access than others. 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.

Additional Needs Alliance

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 for details).

Messy Church has Maximising the Mess guide to help you welcome those with additional needs. **Maximising the Mess**

Churches with Additional Needs Ministry

Trekkers is the name of the additional need children's ministry at **St Saviour's Guildford**. They have a group of volunteers who ensure children and young people with additional needs are welcome at 2 of the churches 3 services. That is either by helping those children access the regular groups or by a separate group for those with more complex needs. They have a home visit to chat with parents/carers to find the best support for each child. There is also a group in the evening service for the 12-14's with additional needs. They ask for advance booking to ensure a safe ratio. They also have midweek groups to support parents and carers.

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. **City Gates**

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. **Aslan**

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.

Care For the Family

Parenting for Faith have a podcast on what it's been like to be a disabled mum and wife, and how the church can do better in our inclusion of those with disabilities- Jade talks with so much wisdom and honesty about that time of her life. **Parenting for Faith**

ASD Specific Support

Alma Autism – helps churches and community groups to better understand Autism and supports them to offer a space and sense of belonging to autistic people and their families through training days for the church and practical workshops. Each tailored to the needs of each individual church/community. Some of the workshops include the teaching on Autism, Church and Belonging; Autism and children's Ministry; Sensory Bible stories and more. Look on Facebook and Instagram @almaautismuk for ideas or you can contact them on almaautism@hotmail.com

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.

Autism and the Church



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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.

Included By Grace

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.

Ambitious About Autism

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

Article

The Autistic Society also has helpful information

Autism Society

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. There are lots of ideas for using different senses to connect with children.

Ask the CYP team for a copy.

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.

Methodist Church

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.

Enabling Church Course

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.

Count Everyone In

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.

Toolkit