

Making Church More Accessible for Neurodivergent People



**PRACTICAL IDEAS FOR CREATING
WELCOMING AND INCLUSIVE
CHURCH COMMUNITIES**



A Few Words Before You Begin

Every person experiences church differently, and small changes can make a significant difference to how welcomed and included someone feels

This booklet brings together practical ideas that churches may wish to consider when thinking about how they can become more accessible for people who are neurodivergent. Every church is different, so these suggestions are intended to inspire conversation rather than provide a checklist.

Our hope is simple:

That every person knows they are welcomed, valued and able to participate fully in the life of the Church.

Understanding Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity recognises that people's brains work in different ways.

Someone who is neurodivergent may experience the world differently from those who are neurotypical. This can include people who are autistic, have ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxis, Tourette syndrome and other neurological differences.

No two people are the same.

One adjustment that helps one person may not help another, so the best approach is to listen, learn, and ask people what helps them.

*If you've met one neurodivergent person...
you've met one neurodivergent person!*

Creating an Accessible Environment

Small changes to your physical space can help reduce stress and sensory overload.

Things to try:

- Create quieter spaces in the church by having an area in the worship space where speakers are not directed
- Have an area in the building where people can go for quiet time
- Coloured overlays (of different colours) available (especially if there are hymn books/service sheets etc)
- Fidget toys available
- Be aware of sensory stimulation: smells, light, sound, touch, etc
- Fix flicking lights
- Important dates/notices listed on a board, in clear font and not too visually cluttered

Worship & Church Activities

The way we plan and lead worship can help people feel more able to participate and know what to expect.

Ideas to try:

- Have the last row (or area by the entrance) reserved for those who come in late
- Break the sermon/talk up into smaller chunks
- Follow a similar routine each service (if possible)
- Try not to use phrases like “break a leg” that have a metaphorical meaning - be literal
- Have the audio at the lowest level possible, while still being audible for others
- Make it clear that when sharing the Peace, physical contact is not compulsory
- When advertising services, be clear about what you will be doing
- At something like Bible study, do not expect everyone to read, and make this clear

Welcoming One Another

Often, it is our attitudes and understanding that makes the greatest difference. Creating a culture where people feel accepted and able to be themselves helps everyone belong.

Ideas to try:

- Congregations taking time to get to know one another, listen and learn, allowing each other to present their true selves - making space for being uncomfortable, safely, if needed
- Start conversations about neurodivergence, giving people the space to share their stories
- Be accepting of noise
- Be accepting of unexpected movements or behaviours (in line with safeguarding)
- Allow those who are neurodivergent to be a central part of the church community - actively encourage them and their families to be involved

Helping People Feel Comfortable

Sometimes it is the small practical details that help people feel more at ease and reduce anxiety.

Ideas to try:

- Name tags and/or role tags for stewards
- Transitioning from the service to the social isn't always instant - give people time and space if they need it; signs may include remaining seated or going to the loo shortly afterwards
- Training on impulsivity/inattentiveness of the congregation for key people (e.g. stewards, ministers etc) to help others understand these behaviours

Every Small Change Matters

Every church is different, and not every suggestion will be right for every setting. However, each step towards greater understanding and accessibility can help someone feel more welcomed, valued and able to participate in the life of the Church.

Use these ideas as a starting point for conversations within your church, and consider which changes could make the greatest difference in your own context.

