



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 help you think about how your church welcomes, includes and engages with those who have additional needs. This guide has been informed by the work of the Additional Needs Alliance, and the Messy Church SEND resource.

Welcome

- Welcome every member of the family, whether or not they have additional needs.
- Look beyond the disability and see the child, young person or adult. Enjoy the uniqueness of each person and look for Jesus in them.
- 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.
- Build a relationship with parent(s)/carer(s) - sensitively seek advice from them. Ask how you can best offer assistance or support, and allow their child/young person to fully belong to your church family. Any assistance should be offered, not forced.

How to welcome and include those with additional needs

'Over 1.5 million pupils in England have special educational needs (SEN)' - UK Gov 2023

Support

- Understand each child/young person and their individual needs, create one-page profiles with them and ensure you have an appropriate strategy for each child. Where possible, consider one-to-one support.
- Consider appointing a Special Educational Needs and Disability Needs Co-ordinator (SENDCO) for your church.
- Be accommodating of what you may consider to be unusual behaviour or noises. Allow children, young people and their parents or carers 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.
- Be discrete and confidential with all families and individuals.



Be observant
Be patient
PRAY

Scan the QR code to access useful links for further advice and resources.

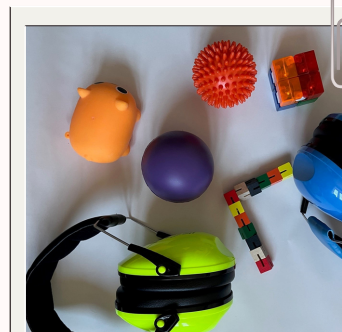
Visit <https://tinyurl.com/GoTeamContacts> to get in touch with your Archdeaconry based Go Team adviser.



Engagement

- Use visual timetables to help children/young people to know what to expect in the session.
- Keep your language simple, clear and concise.
- 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.
- Find out what the children and young people enjoy doing and try to find ways to link it to what you are trying to do in your session.

How to welcome and include those with additional needs



An assortment of fidget toys

Inclusion

- Include young people and children with additional needs to ensure they are offered the same opportunities to participate as their peers.
- Consider having 'fiddle boxes' and ear defenders available for anyone to use.
- Put the same idea across in several different ways, as everyone processes information in different ways.
- Be aware that some children and young people are hyper-sensitive to noise, places, smells etc, especially if they occur suddenly or without warning.
- As much as possible, include children and young people in decision making, and ask them how you can best support them, rather than assuming the best course of action.

An example of a visual timetable you might use to show people with additional needs what's happening in the session.

