

Including Adults with Disabilities in Religious Life and Education



VANDERBILT KENNEDY CENTER
FOR EXCELLENCE IN DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

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Introduction

Many problems of the past are being resolved for people with disabilities who want to participate in religious communities. Physical barriers are being removed so that people with disabilities get past the parking lot, into the building, and in the pews worshipping. Now, there are new challenges to overcome so that people with disabilities might not be present only, but fully included.

To achieve inclusion, the new challenge concerns educating people with disabilities alongside typical members. Both curriculum and programming exist that serve people of differing abilities in many different faiths. Still underdeveloped, however, are religious education resources and materials for adults and young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (ID/DD). In comparison to the resources that exist for including children with disabilities in religious education, little exists for an adult in a congregation who is able to be included in education with typical members.

Studies of disability and religion identify barriers to inclusion and provide resources and instructional guides for physical accessibility, ways to address and change attitudes, and lesson plans for children's classes and self-contained classrooms of people of all ages with disabilities. Along with those barriers that affect people of all ages with disabilities, this manual will address three barriers to full participation that are specific to adults with disabilities. The three barriers include religious leaders' lack of training or understanding; the attitudes of the congregation; and the absence of planning that fosters participation.

This manual is designed for anyone who is a religious leader. Many practices used here are already identified as effective in other fields of disability. The goal is to draw upon existing resources in order to create a guide specifically for adults.

Important Terms

Several terms that are used throughout this manual are important in understanding how to begin a plan for inclusion in a faith community.

1. *Intellectual disability*, formerly known as mental retardation, is characterized by impaired intellectual functioning and limited adaptive behavior.
2. *Developmental disability* is a condition that is significant and ongoing, begins before age 22, and substantially limits functioning in daily activities of living. Examples of developmental disabilities include autism, brain injury, cerebral palsy, and Down syndrome.
3. *People-first language* is a way of speaking that informs attitudes and treatment of people with disabilities. When a person uses people-first language, he or she puts the person before the disability. An example is, “the person with an intellectual disability.” People-first language avoids saying, “the intellectually disabled person.”
4. *Inclusion* means a person with a disability is included in regular activities and education in their faith community with other members who do not necessarily have disabilities. They are full participants, sharing their gifts and talents with the community.
5. *Religious leader* refers to any person who is in a leadership role in a congregation, whether clergy or laity, paid or volunteer. This will be the person who takes a leading role in the process of inclusion.
6. *Faith community* is used instead of church, synagogue, and other faith-specific terms to be inclusive of all traditions that wish to develop a plan for including an adult with an intellectual or developmental disability.



Religious Leader Guide

Inclusion

Many adults and young adults with ID/DD would like to be included in regular education and activities in their congregations. The first step to including a person with ID/DD in a faith community is learning the role of a religious leader.

A religious leader is anyone who takes a leadership role in the inclusion process whether clergy or laity. Although many religious leaders think that inclusion is important and know people in their congregations who could be included, little training and few resources are available, especially pertaining to adults with disabilities. In this first section the religious leader will learn how to be an advocate and will be given the tools to begin the inclusion process.

Religious Leader's Role as Advocate

The religious leader who takes a leadership role in the inclusion process can be an advocate. As the congregation begins including the person with ID/DD, an advocate will be necessary to guide everyone through the learning process and remove barriers. An advocate can be a person who actively supports and aids another; a congregational guide; or someone who builds bridges connecting gifts, needs, opportunities, involvement, and relationships. Some ways to use advocacy skills include being an active listener, participating in conflict resolution, and showing compassion and empathy.

Table 2.1 gives examples of possible roles for the religious leader acting as an advocate. Whatever role the religious leader adopts to advocate for the person with ID/DD, the goal is to begin the inclusion process by supporting the person and guiding the congregation.

Table 2.1

The Roles of a Leader	
Advocacy	Be a mediator and conflict resolver.
Attitude	Lead through example and focus on ability rather than disability.
Language	Be aware of people first language and use language that affirms rather than diminishes.
Physical accessibility	Ask if the building is accessible and if the person has the physical supports necessary to participate.
Programming and participation	Be a leader in asking the person to participate in worship, religious education, and social/outreach programming.
Communication	Be a leader in asking straight-forward questions and addressing issues that might take away from inclusion.
Spiritual formation	Be a leader in nurturing the person's spirituality in the same ways that you would any other member.
Education	Be a leader in doing what it takes to include the person in religious education by either adapting materials, contacting the right people, or finding the right resources.

Begin Listening by Meeting Together

One role of the religious leader as advocate is to be a good listener, and listening begins by meeting together. The advocate can begin listening by scheduling a meeting with the person with a disability and using the Adult with an Intellectual Disability Information (AIDI) Form. As shown in Appendix 1, the AIDI Form is a guide to asking questions and gathering important information. The religious leader can be a good listener by asking the right questions. Some important questions include asking about the adult's abilities and challenges, needs for inclusion, health and medical needs, beliefs, and past experiences in religious communities.

Resources for the Religious Leader	
<input type="checkbox"/> AIDI Form	Appendix 1
<input type="checkbox"/> Inclusion in a Faith Community Tip Sheets	Appendix 2
<input type="checkbox"/> The Roles of a Leader	Table 2.1 and Appendix 3

Section Review

1. The religious leader learns about being an advocate in the congregation.
2. The religious leader has an initial meeting with the person with a disability to establish a relationship and to learn more about the person.



Forming a Team

The First Step to a Plan for Inclusion

After gathering information from the AIDI Form, the religious leader can consider who the person has talked with or interacted with in the congregation so far, what has happened, and what current issues need to be addressed. The goal is to select a team that can create a plan that meets the person's needs so that he or she can be fully included in the faith community.

To create a plan, the religious leader can gather a group of interested people and experts to form a team or committee. An important aspect of gathering an effective team is recognizing the individuality of the person with the disability as well as your own faith community. In this section the religious leader will learn how to select a team that will make a plan for inclusion and ask individuals to be members of the team.

Choosing Team Members

Anyone can be a member of the inclusion team. To be a part of the team, a person does not need to be an expert in disability or religion. Table 3.1 provides a list of potential team members. Although outside experts can offer good advice and be a good resource, bringing in outside experts usually is not necessary. A good way to begin forming the team is to use the natural sources, experts, or willing volunteers you already have before looking outward. The most important quality of a team member is willingness to do what it takes to realize full inclusion for the person with a disability.

The next step is to ask individuals to participate in the process of making a plan for inclusion. Once the team members are determined, the religious leader can set a time for the team's first meeting.

Section Review

1. The religious leader begins to form a team by identifying possible team members.
2. The religious leader asks individuals to be members of the team.

Table 3.1

Potential Team Members
<input type="checkbox"/> the person with the disability
<input type="checkbox"/> faith partner (see Section IV.)
<input type="checkbox"/> committed people
<input type="checkbox"/> others with disabilities
<input type="checkbox"/> a family member or friend of the person with a disability
<input type="checkbox"/> people with responsibility to plan and lead worship
<input type="checkbox"/> people with influence in making policy or church governance
<input type="checkbox"/> people with responsibility for managing the building (if physical accessibility is an issue)
<input type="checkbox"/> people with responsibility for educational curricula
<input type="checkbox"/> people with special education skills and/or disability expertise
<input type="checkbox"/> people with responsibility for community outreach
<input type="checkbox"/> people who are on the staff of the faith community: a pastor, religious educator, youth director

Faith Partner

Support through Relationship

Pairing a person with a disability with a faith partner will provide extra support through one-on-one interaction. The religious leader and the team are important supports for carrying out the plan for inclusion, and the faith partner is the support that gives a meaningful, personal relationship. A faith partner may assist in encouraging richer and more meaningful inclusion, helping to establish the same social benefits that the members of the congregation without disabilities enjoy. In Section IV, the religious leader will learn what a faith partner is and the steps to pairing people together.

The Faith Partner's Role as Peer Buddy

The idea of faith partners has its roots in the Peer Buddy model, an education setting strategy that pairs a student with a disability with a peer without a disability to develop skills for social interaction, academics, and creating and sustaining relationships. The Peer Buddy model is proven to be effective by research and is used by high school and transition students in special education for academics and social interaction. There are many benefits of the Peer Buddy model for the person with ID/DD, including opportunities for interaction; more positive social outcomes for the person with a disability; and quality, frequency, and occurrence of social interaction is improved.

There are also many benefits of the Peer Buddy model for the faith partner, some of which are participating in a program that provides training and guidance on how to interact with a person with a disability; people involved are more likely to initiate social interaction with the person with a disability; and it leads to a history and comfort level that can only be developed through having a friendship.

The Faith Partner's Role as Spiritual Guide and Friend

The purpose of the faith partner is to provide adequate support, opportunities, and to ultimately form lasting relationships in an inclusive setting. The difference is that the faith partner model goes one step further and emphasizes creating a friendship based on spirituality. There are two purposes of the pairing: to make a personal connection that provides support and to increase full participation in congregational life. A religious leader can identify potential faith partners by looking for someone who has similar interests, lives close to the person with a disability, is near the same age, and has a willingness to participate.

Finding a Faith Partner

To find a faith partner, a religious leader can meet with the person with ID/DD to introduce and explain the concept of faith partner. If the person would like to have a faith partner, the next step is identifying potential people to ask. People who are already friends, live near each other, or have the time to commit to the friendship are good candidates. At this point, you will have gathered information on the AIDI form that will aid you in your approach of this pairing. When someone agrees to be a faith partner the religious leader should then meet with them and give them the *Guide for Faith Partners* (Appendix 4). The faith partner should be invited to be a member of the team to plan inclusion, and should meet with the person with ID/DD to talk about what they will do together. The partners can make a formal or informal agreement about their friendship.

Resource for the Religious Leader	
<input type="checkbox"/> Guide for Faith Partners.	Table 4.1 and Appendix 4

Section Review

1. The religious leader discusses the idea of being paired with a faith partner with the person with a disability.
2. The religious leader identifies potential faith partners and asks someone.
3. The religious leader goes over the concept of faith partner and responsibilities with the new faith partner.

Table 4.1

Guide for Faith Partners
A faith partner is:
<input type="checkbox"/> a mediator and conflict resolver
<input type="checkbox"/> a leader through example by focusing on ability rather than disability, and modeling a good attitude
<input type="checkbox"/> aware of people first language
<input type="checkbox"/> aware of issues of physical accessibility
<input type="checkbox"/> a guide and helper with programming and participation in worship, religious education, and social/outreach opportunities
<input type="checkbox"/> a communication guide who is available to talk to members of the congregation and is a regular conversation partner for the person with a disability
<input type="checkbox"/> a spiritual guide who nurtures the person's spirituality in the same ways that a person would any other friend
<input type="checkbox"/> an educator who gives help and answers questions before, after, or during classes or studies
<input type="checkbox"/> a friend during social opportunities by inviting, offering rides, and engaging in conversations



Team Meeting

Planning and Participation

A common barrier to inclusion for adults with disabilities is planning and participation. The team meeting will make plans concrete and provide accountability for everyone involved. Team members will know their responsibilities and what supports are needed so that participation will occur. In this section the religious leader will facilitate a team meeting, put into writing the plan for inclusion, and make a covenant with the team.

Facilitating

The religious leader is the facilitator of the team meeting. To begin, state the purpose of the meeting. Emphasize that everyone present is a member of the team so that the person with the disability is not being served, but is serving with the team. A religious leader can tell the team that the purpose of the meeting is to create a plan for inclusion and a covenant.

Inclusion Plan

The religious leader will use the Inclusion Plan Form (Table 5.1 and Appendix 5) to put the plan into writing. The plan can be changed to fit individual needs. It is not important that there is a plan for every possible activity available. It is important that the person with ID/DD is participating and that the plan includes the activities that are most important to the person. Discuss what involvement will look like. Involvement could be connected to a place, like the Bible study classroom, or to an event, like visiting people in the hospital. Discuss the types of support needed for full participation. Supports include any adaptations, modifications, and accommodations the team thinks are necessary. Supports could be materials, adaptations made to lesson plans, physical changes to an environment, or simply making plans ahead of time so that participation is always possible.

Table 5.1

Inclusion Plan Describe plans and adaptations that will be used to include the person in congregational life.			
Activities	What will involvement look like?	What supports and adaptations will be needed for participation?	Who will carry out this part of the plan?
Small group activities			
Large group activities			
Worship services			
Rituals, Sacraments, or other community traditions			
Service, outreach, social opportunities			
Faith partner			
Other			

Examples for an Inclusion Plan

What will involvement look like?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Small group	a Bible study
<input type="checkbox"/> Large group	participating in Wednesday night meals
<input type="checkbox"/> Worship	being an usher
<input type="checkbox"/> Rituals	taking communion
<input type="checkbox"/> Service	visiting people in the hospital
<input type="checkbox"/> Faith partner	sitting together during worship each week

What supports and adaptations will be needed for participation?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Small group	a simplified outline of the main points prepared before a class or study
<input type="checkbox"/> Large group	designating a space at a table for the person so that their wheelchair can move through easily
<input type="checkbox"/> Worship	a highlighted, large print copy of the bulletin
<input type="checkbox"/> Rituals	asking the faith partner to accompany a person with a physical disability at communion so that he/she does not have to hold and pass the bread and cup
<input type="checkbox"/> Service	preparing a card or small gift for a person who is nonverbal to deliver to someone in the hospital
<input type="checkbox"/> Faith partner	calling the night before to see if the person needs a ride.

Who will carry out this part of the plan?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Small group	Bible study leader or Sunday school teacher
<input type="checkbox"/> Large group	janitor, faith partner, person in charge of the activity, or volunteer
<input type="checkbox"/> Worship	usher, office staff, faith partner, or volunteer
<input type="checkbox"/> Rituals	religious leader or faith partner
<input type="checkbox"/> Service	chair or member of the committee in charge, faith partner, or volunteer
<input type="checkbox"/> Faith partner	faith partner

Make a Covenant

A covenant is a written agreement to carry out the inclusion plan. The purpose of writing the covenant and having all team members sign is to encourage responsibility and commitment to carrying out the plan. Information in the covenant might include what is being promised, how the goals will be accomplished, when the team will meet, and who is part of the covenant.

Table 5.2

Covenant Outline
<input type="checkbox"/> What is being promised?
<input type="checkbox"/> How will the goal be accomplished?
<input type="checkbox"/> When will you meet again?
<input type="checkbox"/> Who is part of the covenant?

Table 5.3

Example Covenant	
<input type="checkbox"/> We will work together to carry out this plan to include (name).	
<input type="checkbox"/> We will pray for each other, follow the plan, and talk to each other about problems and successes.	
<input type="checkbox"/> We will meet again (date).	
<input type="checkbox"/> Names/signatures of team members, including the person with a disability.	

Resources for the Religious Leader	
<input type="checkbox"/> Inclusion Plan.	Table 5.1 and Appendix 5
<input type="checkbox"/> Covenant Outline and Example Covenant.	Tables 5.2, 5.3, and Appendix 6

Section Review

1. The religious leader calls a team meeting and facilitates.
2. The team fills out the Inclusion Plan.
3. The team makes a covenant to carry out the Inclusion Plan.

Follow-up Meeting

Assessing the Inclusion Plan

The purpose of a follow-up meeting is to make sure the plan is working by reviewing what has been done and deciding if anything should be changed. In this section the religious leader will be given tools for evaluating the plan at a follow-up meeting with the team, including an Inclusion Plan Review Form and Inclusion Questionnaire.

The religious leader schedules the meeting and informs all members of the date and time. During this meeting, the team can review the inclusion plan, fill out the questionnaire, make changes, and renew their covenant.

Inclusion Plan Review

The religious leader can use the Inclusion Plan Review Form (Table 6.1) to determine if changes need to be made for the plan to be more effective in the next year. Changes could be necessary if the person with ID/DD needs more or less supports, a member of the team would like to be replaced, a new member is added, or the faith community's programming or scheduling has changed. No matter the cause, changes should reflect the importance of full participation for the person with ID/DD.

Table 6.1

Inclusion Plan Describe plans and adaptations that will be used to include the person in congregational life.				
Activities	What did involvement look like?	What supports and adaptations were needed for participation?	Who carried out this part of the plan?	Are there changes to be made?
Small group activities				
Large group activities				
Worship services				
Rituals, Sacraments, or other community traditions				
Service, outreach, social opportunities				
Faith partner				
Other				

Inclusion Questionnaire

The purpose of the questionnaire (Table 6.2) is to assess the plan's effectiveness. This meeting and review gives all members of the team a chance to communicate openly about how they think the plan is working and how to make changes. The religious leader should include the person with ID/DD in filling out the questionnaire. All other team members should be given the chance to respond, too. When the team determines what is working and will continue to happen and what is not working and will be changed, they can revise the Inclusion Plan Form.

Table 6.2

Meeting Questionnaire				
Team Member	Strengths of the Plan	Weaknesses of the Plan	What should stay the same?	What should change?

Examples for the Meeting Questionnaire	
Examples of strengths of the plan:	Examples of weaknesses of the plan:
<input type="checkbox"/> Personal relationships	Infrequent attendance by person with ID/DD
<input type="checkbox"/> Increased attendance	Other members not being friendly and accepting
<input type="checkbox"/> Physical adaptation that allows access to certain spaces	Lack of materials
<input type="checkbox"/> Increased understanding of the discussion in Bible study	Too time consuming
Examples of what should stay the same:	Examples of what should change:
<input type="checkbox"/> The faith partner	Call the person the night before to ask if they plan on attending
<input type="checkbox"/> Giving the person a ride to the place of worship	Educate the members on disability and teach them how to be friendly and accepting
<input type="checkbox"/> Placement of ramps	Ask for more money to be budgeted for your team or ask members to donate resources
<input type="checkbox"/> Adapting lessons ahead of time to a simple outline format	Ask for more help from other people, ask someone else to take over, or try a new plan

Renew the Covenant

After revising the Inclusion Plan, the team can look at their covenant and decide if it should be revised as well. The meeting will end when the team members sign the covenant again.

Resources for the Religious Leader	
<input type="checkbox"/> Inclusion Plan Review	Table 6.1 and Appendix 7
<input type="checkbox"/> Inclusion Questionnaire	Table 6.2 and Appendix 8

Section Review

1. The religious leader schedules a team meeting.
2. The team reviews the Inclusion Plan.
3. The team fills out the Questionnaire.
4. The team revises the plan.
5. The team renews their covenant.

Educating the Congregation

The Attitude Barrier

Whether attitudinal barriers are the result of unexamined, yet deeply-rooted prejudice or lack of understanding and thoughtlessness, this type of barrier is one of the most important to address before a person with a disability can be included in religious education. To help an adult with a disability be included, a leader can move people away from thinking of the person as having a disability and toward thinking of the person as having many abilities. The key to overcoming barriers of attitude is affirming the individuality and gifts of a person. Positive beliefs can be developed through addressing attitudes directly, recognizing and praising efforts, and having high expectations for people with disabilities and members of the congregation. In this section the religious leader will learn how to recognize attitude barriers and how to educate the congregation about issues surrounding attitude barriers.

Recognizing Attitude Barriers

Table 7.1 gives examples of potential attitude barriers.

Table 7.1

Components of the attitude barrier:	
<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of hospitality	Not inviting people to events, not engaging in conversation.
<input type="checkbox"/> Failure to affirm individuality	Ministering to rather than with, paternalistic actions, treating a person like the object of charity.
<input type="checkbox"/> Unexamined theological beliefs	The practice of inclusion should align with and not be in tension with the congregation's message, actions, and interpretation of scripture.
<input type="checkbox"/> Incorrect belief in necessity of expertise	Many people believe that to work with a person with a disability training and expertise is needed.
<input type="checkbox"/> Inadvertent prejudice	Believing faith is determined by cognitive ability.

Deciding What Type of Education is Necessary in a Congregation

A plan for education and discussion can be set up for the person with a disability, people who will be involved with the person, and congregants who are interested.

The person with a disability should be given the choice of how the communication and education takes place. Some choices could be the person gives a talk, the person is present and someone else leads discussion, or the person is not present but is aware that a discussion will take place. Table 7.2 gives examples of potential settings, participants, and information for educating congregants about disabilities.

Some topics to include in congregational education are inclusion, disability etiquette and awareness, and people-first language. The educational opportunity should tell those present why inclusion is important to the congregation and to the individual with a disability. Disability etiquette and awareness are important to changing the attitudes of members. Teaching a person how to interact with adults with disabilities and what their abilities and disabilities mean for their social and spiritual lives will make interactions more comfortable for everyone. Another important step in changing attitudes is using people-first language. By referring to someone as “a person with a disability” rather than “a disabled person,” the focus is on the person instead of the disability. People-first language is important because the way leaders and congregants speak about and to a person with a disability affects how leaders, congregants, and the person think and act.

There are other elements of educating the congregation that the religious leader can be aware of. The religious leader can try to find natural settings and opportunities for education on disability. For example, the religious leader can work with meetings already scheduled or groups that already have a connection to the person or to disability issues. Also, the leader can lead by modeling. Members of the congregation will pick up on the attitudes of religious leaders and others in leadership positions. A positive example can be set through words and actions. Finally, the religious leader can address problems directly but carefully. The leader can make it clear what the correct channels are for members with questions or problems so that the person with a disability and other members are not offended, uncomfortable, or upset. It is important to resolve conflicts.

Resources for the Religious Leader	
❑ Disability Organizations List	Appendix 9

Section Review

1. The religious leader learns about attitude barriers and prepares to educate the congregation.
2. The religious leader organizes an educational opportunity for the congregation to learn about attitudes, awareness, and etiquette.

Table 7.2

Determine the setting(s):	Who	When and Where	What
Discussion led by person with the disability	The person, team member(s), faith partner, congregants, a community disability service provider	Sunday school, Wednesday night fellowship, committee meeting, meeting on inclusion	Disability etiquette tip sheet, handout on facts about the person's disability
Discussion led by someone else, with or without the person with the disability present	The person, team member(s), faith partner, congregants, a community disability service provider	Youth group, potluck lunch	Handout to pass around for people to write questions on, handout with the congregation's denominational disability statement
Sermon or brief talk	Person with a disability, faith partner, religious leader	During worship service, committee meeting, Sunday school or other small group	Bulletin insert with brief facts about denomination's history with disability and beliefs about God and disability, handout with list of websites with disability information
Small group(s)/discussion group(s)	The person, team member(s), faith partner, congregants, a community disability service provider	At the normal meeting time and place	Paper for group members to write ideas about how to make inclusion better in the congregation
Written communication	The person, religious leader, a family member or close friend, faith partner	newsletter article, email from religious leader, bulletin insert	Specific information about the person, general information about the disability

Inclusive Religious Education

Educational Accessibility

At times, the typical ways that religious communities communicate and teach are inaccessible to people with disabilities. If a person has a hearing impairment, attending a Sunday school class that only uses discussion and lecture to teach may have nothing to offer. For a person who cannot read, a community that only offers small group opportunities that are studies or book clubs may feel that the community is excluding them. To break down these barriers of communication, a leader can find ways to accommodate people with many different physical and intellectual disabilities who need different adaptations and modifications. In this section the religious leader will learn how to plan ahead for inclusion, review for effectiveness, and make adaptations to written materials or lesson plans.

Plan Ahead

The majority of the planning for inclusion in a religious education setting is contained within the Inclusion Plan (Appendix 5) from Section V. A religious leader can use the Inclusion Plan to make adaptations to materials and determine who is in charge of making these adaptations in specific classes that offer religious education experiences. Other factors to consider in planning ahead are making sure the person will be present in the class on the day planned for and making sure the person is comfortable with and will benefit from the accommodations being made.

Review for Effectiveness

The religious leader will find it helpful to take the time to reflect on specific instances of inclusion as they happen. Reviewing what adaptations were used, who helped, and the level of helpfulness to the person with the disability will determine if the inclusion plan is effective. The religious leader and the team should not waste time and energy on plans that do not work.

Use a checklist like the Inclusion Review (Appendix 10) after a Bible study, book club meeting, or prayer group to record thoughts and observations. The religious leader, the person with the disability, or other team members can use the checklist. Keeping a notebook with checklists for reflection and the inclusion plan will be helpful to determine what parts of the plan are succeeding and what parts are failing. The religious leader can make changes to the plan as needed by asking the person what they think would work better and calling a team meeting to revise the plan.

Table 8.1

Inclusion Review		
Setting:_____	Date:_____	Name:_____
Was _____ (person's name) involved?		
Which supports and adaptations worked?		
Which supports and adaptations did not work?		
Who carried out the planning?		
Comments:		

Adaptations

Adaptations are physical changes that are made to materials or environments so that learning can take place. Any material can be adapted for any disability. A religious leader can think about how much the adaptation will benefit the person with the disability (such as outlining Scripture for a person with ID), what is the easiest way to make the adaptation (such as meeting in a classroom near the elevator and rearranging the furniture instead of meeting in the classroom at the end of the hall), and how the adaptation will fit into what the rest of the class is doing (such as using a simplified version of a prayer for the whole class instead of the version that is lengthy and has difficult language).

Below are ideas for adapting written materials such as curricula, lesson plans, articles, or chapters from books. Also included are ideas for adapting materials (Adaptations, Table 8.2 and Appendix 11) and environments to include people with visual and hearing impairments and physical disabilities.

Resources for the Religious Leader	
<input type="checkbox"/> Inclusion Review	Table 8.1 and Appendix 10
<input type="checkbox"/> Adaptations	Table 8.2 and Appendix 11

Section Review

1. The religious leader plans for inclusion to take place in specific religious education settings.
2. The religious leader reviews the effectiveness of the inclusion plan by recording information in order to make changes if necessary.
3. The religious leader makes adaptations to materials and/or environments.

Table 8.2

Written materials	Visual impairments	Hearing impairments	Physical disabilities
Outline important points.	Seat the person close to the speaker.	Seat the person close to the speaker.	Ask the person if they want assistance before giving it.
Make the text larger and use an easy-to-read font	Say the person's name before speaking to them	Get the person's attention before speaking to them.	Try to communicate directly with the person and at eye level.
Give visual cues by allowing space between sentences that end and begin thoughts or concepts.	Have materials available in a different format such as Braille or audio.	Look directly at the person to whom you are speaking.	Arrange an educational space ahead of time to make space for a wheelchair or to provide necessary accommodations.
Simplify the wording. Make the language as concrete as possible.	Avoid overusing visual teaching methods such as powerpoint, pictures or images, and videos.	Do not speak too quickly or cover your mouth when speaking so that the person can lip read.	Choose a meeting space that is easy to get to and near an accessible bathroom.
Use a highlighter to call attention to what is most important.		Talk directly to the person even if they do not understand.	Think creatively; most materials can be physically adapted to accommodate physical disabilities.
Changes should either be changes that will make sense in the context of the whole group or follow along very closely.			

Social Inclusion

Part of the Group

Even though faith communities implementing plans for inclusion strive to be places for people of all ability levels to feel accepted and part of the group, social inclusion does not always happen naturally. Some problems that might interfere with a person's social inclusion are behavior, uncomfortable problems dealing with subjects such as hygiene, and lack of knowledge of congregants about how to interact with people with disabilities. In this section the religious leader will learn how to begin to deal with challenging behaviors, how to approach uncomfortable subjects, and how to guide others in interacting with people with ID/DD.

Behavior

Challenging behaviors might be as minor as talking too much during class or as serious as aggressive words and actions. If the challenging behaviors are very serious, the religious leader will want to decide what is best for the safety of the person and the other members. Before asking others for help, the religious leader can address the issue directly with the person. The person should be made aware that what they are doing is a challenge. If talking to the person does not change the behavior, the issue can be approached in two ways: asking an expert or someone with experience to help, and determining the cause and effect surrounding the behavior.

The religious leader can ask for help from family members, close friends, service providers, caretakers, or experts on behavior. There might be a plan in place already for changing the behavior or one of these people might know what causes the behavior and how to change it.

A way to determine why someone is behaving in a certain way is looking at what happens before the behavior and what happens after. The purpose of determining the cause and effect of a behavior is so that what happens before or what happens after can be changed so that the behavior changes. First, identify the challenging behavior: a person frequently uses inappropriate language during a lesson. Next, observe the person during a lesson and look for a pattern as to what happens before the person curses: the person starts cursing about 20 minutes into class. Then, look for a pattern as to what happens after the person curses: the person curses and one of the class member laughs and another speaks directly to the person. Finally, make an educated guess about why the person is engaging in the challenging behavior. In this example, the person seems to want attention. When the reason for the

behavior is determined, a plan can be developed for changing the behavior. For the person who curses, the religious leader could try speaking directly to him at least once every five minutes so that he is getting consistent attention.

Table 9.1

Determining the Cause of Problem Behavior		
Name:_____	Date:_____	Setting:_____
What happened before?		
What does the problem behavior look like?		
What happened after?		
What is the purpose of the behavior?		
Possible solutions for changing the behavior:		

Uncomfortable Subjects

Sometimes issues arise that are not exactly problems, but they interfere with being included socially. A religious leader should think carefully, though, about whether or not the issue is an appropriate one to address. Social inclusion is important, but sometimes leaders and congregants need to make changes as much as people with disabilities. A religious leader can consider whether the issue is something the person with a disability should change or something the congregants can learn to accept.

Issues that are difficult to talk about could be hygiene, personal space, love and romance, or setting boundaries. Once again, the first step is for the religious leader to talk to the person about the issue to make him or her aware of the problem. If talking does not help, a religious leader can use the Determining the Cause of a Problem Behavior Form (Table 9.1 and Appendix 12), or try to find a way to motivate the person to change the behavior or situation.

A possible way to motivate someone might be offering a reward. Anything can be a reward that motivates the person to come to the place of worship showered and wearing deodorant, to give the girl he likes at least two feet of personal space, or to stop burping out loud. The religious leader should make the terms of receiving the reward very clear. Putting the agreement in writing can be helpful. Creating a document that says what the person agrees to do and whether or not they have accomplished the goal will help the person stay on track. Below is an example of a document a religious leader and a person with a disability can keep to track changing a behavior like respecting others' time.

Behavior Modifications	
<input type="checkbox"/> I will only come to the office to talk to Rev. Ben on Monday at 10 a.m.	
<input type="checkbox"/> If I keep this promise for at least 2 weeks, Rev. Ben and I will go to lunch.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Week 1	Yes
<input type="checkbox"/> Week 2	No
<input type="checkbox"/> Week 3	Yes
<input type="checkbox"/> Week 4	Yes
<input type="checkbox"/> Goal achieved?	Yes

Interacting

Beyond changing attitudes, the religious education class in which the person is participating may need help learning how to interact with the member with a disability. Interacting with a person with a disability does not require any special skills, but Table 9.2 (Appendix 13) gives suggestions for congregants.

Resources for the Religious Leader	
<input type="checkbox"/> Determining the Cause of a Problem Behavior.	Appendix 12
<input type="checkbox"/> Interacting with People with Disabilities	Appendix 13

Section Review

1. The religious leader recognizes a problematic behavior.
2. The religious leader creates a plan to change the behavior.
3. The religious leader helps other members learn how to interact and socially include a person with a disability.

Table 9.2

Interacting with People with Disabilities
<input type="checkbox"/> Always talk to the person directly; do not talk about them to someone else.
<input type="checkbox"/> Put the person first and the disability second. For example, say “the woman who is blind” rather than “the blind woman.”
<input type="checkbox"/> Do not unnecessarily avoid the subject of disability.
<input type="checkbox"/> Use concrete language and avoid sarcasm.
<input type="checkbox"/> Avoid being patronizing, condescending, or treating the person like a child.
<input type="checkbox"/> Be direct in your communications.



Conclusion

Religious education for adults with ID/DD may be a challenge for faith communities, but it is a challenge that may be met. Faith communities can use existing practices that are proven to be effective in including adults with disabilities. When a community has the tools to individualize education and adapt situations and settings, adults can be fully included and participate in all aspects of community life.

The guidelines in this manual for forming a plan to include an adult with a disability are only guidelines. A religious leader in a faith community can use and manipulate the sections of this manual that will provide the most benefit for the individual with a disability. The main purpose of the manual is for leaders and congregants to be provided with tools for education and training on disability issues, changing negative attitudes, and planning and participation for adults with disabilities. Individualized planning with the support of a team and the input of the person with a disability will help adults with disabilities learn alongside and share their gifts with their faith communities.

About the Author

Lydia Wingo Kane moved to Tennessee from Arkansas to study English at Lambuth University. Her undergraduate education led her to pursue a Master's of Theological Studies at Vanderbilt Divinity School, and then a Master's of Education in special education from Vanderbilt University's Peabody College. Work experiences that proved significant in forming an interest in religion and disabilities include working for a family of a child with Down syndrome for several years and participating in the Disabilities, Religion, and Spirituality Program at the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities.

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Information Form	
Do you need help filling out this form?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Name:	
Birth date:	Gender: <input type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> F
Address:	
City/State/Zip:	
Email:	Phone:
Do you have any family members who go to this church?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
What are their names?	
Do you have any friends who go to this church?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
What are their names?	
Do you have any family members who live in town?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Do you have a disability?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
What is your disability?	
Check all that apply to you:	<input type="checkbox"/> Use hearing aide <input type="checkbox"/> Use wheelchair <input type="checkbox"/> Use walker

What do you enjoy doing or do well?

How do you learn best?

- ☐ Seeing (for example, videos and pictures)
- ☐ Hearing (for example, listening to music or something recorded)
- ☐ Reading (for example, books)
- ☐ Touching (for example, holding objects in your hands)

If you communicate in a way that is different, tell us about how you communicate.

How would you like to help or be involved at church? Circle the ones you want to do.

- ☐ Small group activities (for example, Sunday school or Bible study)
- ☐ Large group activities
- ☐ Other programs (for example, choir)
- ☐ Worship services (usher, greeter, help setting up)
- ☐ Service and outreach opportunities (Habitat for Humanity, visiting hospitals)

Do you need any help at church?

- ☐ Help with wheelchair or walker
- ☐ Large print bulletins and reading materials
- ☐ A friend to help you get around
- ☐ Special seating
- ☐ Other _____

Tell us about where you are right now in your relationship with God.

Is there anything important to you about church that you would like to share with us?

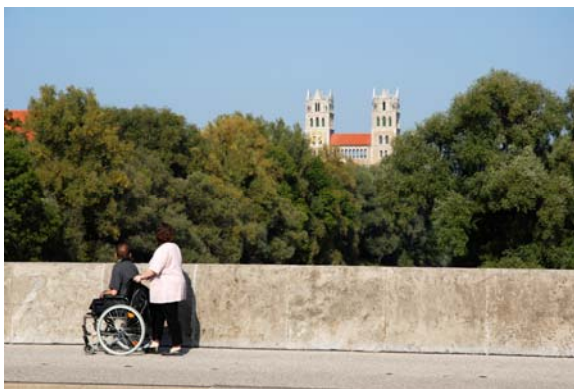
What made you feel welcome here?

Medical Information	
Are you on medication that it is important for us to know about?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Please tell us about your medication.	
Do you have seizures?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Do we need to know anything about your seizures?	
Do you have any challenges with doing certain activities or has a doctor told you not to do certain things?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Please tell us about activities that you can't participate in.	
Are you allergic to any foods?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Please list the foods you are allergic to.	
If you are interested in volunteering please answer the next question.	
Have you ever been fired or asked to resign from a paid or volunteer position because of sexual harassment or physical violence?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

Inclusion in a Faith Community Tip Sheets

Inclusion in a Faith Community

TIPS AND RESOURCES FOR INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES



Inclusion in a Faith Community

Being included means more than being *in* a community. It means being *with* a community. To be fully with a community requires that all aspects of the community—from physical space to attitudes—are accessible and welcoming, and that all members have opportunities to share gifts and to contribute to the community. Sometimes accessibility means making accommodations. Awareness, communication, and working together are strategies that can assist in creating the necessary adaptations that build a community where all members can grow and flourish.

Searching for a Faith Community

When searching for a faith community in which you and/or your family may share your gifts and that may enhance your spiritual growth, be aware that some communities may have more experience with including individuals with disabilities and their families than others, and in different degrees. This means having patience and persistence, being willing to initiate a conversation, and communicating openly about yours and/or your family's interests and needs. To get started, you might:

- Request a meeting with the religious/spiritual leaders and educators to introduce yourself and/or your child. Let them know why it is important to you and/or your family to participate in a faith community.
- Talk with leadership about your or your child's disability. Discuss the potentials and the challenges it may place upon full participation. Explain your needs. This sets up an open line of communication and gives leadership an

opportunity to work with you and your family to ensure a meaningful community experience.

You as a Faith Community's Resource

You know yourself and/or your child better than anyone. You know what works and what does not work in terms of meaningful participation. Once you have found a spiritual home, be sure you are proactive in forming relationships with the leadership and with other congregants. Consider:

- Sharing information about your or your child's disability with specific people—teachers, nursery staff, and other congregants. People may have misconceptions or be hesitant to ask questions. While it is a personal matter, sharing experiences about the ways that disability affects and does not affect your life will raise awareness and educate the people in your community.
- Developing a circle of support within the community. Ask for help when you need it.
- Making periodic appointments with the spiritual leaders/religious educators, and/or care committee, using the time to discuss what has worked well and what has not, and to evaluate how needs have changed. Remember that everyone is learning together.
- Finding the areas where you or your child can contribute your gifts and talents to the community. If there are barriers, address them. Don't shy away. Brainstorm with leaders about how to remove the barriers. Remember that you are ministering to the faith community, even as they are ministering to you.

Community Leadership as a Resource

Part of the religious/spiritual leader's role is to assist congregants when they need help. They often are willing and able to provide spiritual as well as other kinds of support and assistance to families; however, they need to be asked. For example, religious leaders and educators can be wonderful additions to IEP teams. They provide a different vantage point and may be aware of strengths that schools may not have an opportunity to see.

See reverse for resources

Inclusion in the Faith Community

How We Can Help

Who We Are and Who We Serve

The **Vanderbilt Kennedy Center (VKC)** works with and for people with disabilities and family members, service providers and advocates, researchers and policy makers. It is among only a few centers nationwide to be both a University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities and a *Eunice Kennedy Shriver* Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Research Center.

Disabilities, Religion, and Spirituality Program

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Tennessee Disability Pathfinder

This free statewide phone, web, and print referral service in English and Spanish connects the Tennessee disability community with service providers and resources. Its website database has 1,600 agencies searchable by Tennessee county and service. See the "Disability Resource Library" and search the "Interfaith Resources" section, as well as exploring other topic pages. Pathfinder is a project of the VKC and the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities. Contact www.familypathfinder.org (615) 322-8529, toll-free (800) 640-4636.

Other Vanderbilt Resources

Health Library, Jr. League Family Resource Center, Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt Houses a selection of resources on issues related to disabilities and spirituality available for check-out in their "Community and Faith Supports" section. www.vanderbiltchildrens.com/healthlibrary (615) 936-2558, toll-free (800) 288-0391

National Resources

American Association of People with Disabilities Interfaith Initiative supports people with disabilities and their families as they seek spiritual and religious access. www.aapd.com/Interfaith/Interfaith.html

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Print Resources

Acker-Verney, J., Hattie, B., MacDonald, C., & Lekas, S. (2005) *More Than My Disability: A Handbook for Volunteers With Disabilities*. Halifax, NS: Independent Living Resource Center.

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Contact the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center
Nashville (615) 322-8240
Toll-Free (866) 936-VUKC [8852]
vkc.vumc.org
kc@vumc.org

See also:

- *Inclusion in a Faith Community: Tips and Resources for Faith Leaders*
- *Inclusion in a Faith Community: Tips and Resources for Congregational Care Teams*

Inclusion in a Faith Community

TIPS AND RESOURCES FOR CONGREGATIONAL CARE COMMITTEES



Congregational care committees and disabilities

An inclusive faith community commits to sharing one another's joys and challenges. Included members love, respect, and treasure each other; nurture and support one another on a journey through faith; and use their gifts and graces in ministry. This commitment does not change with the experience of disability.

A faith community may have a specific committee for the "care" of its congregants. Often, members of this committee want to support, empower, and enable members with disabilities and their families to grow in their faith and to share their gifts and talents. Yet, sometimes important conversations are not initiated. Too often, families wait for leadership in the faith community to make a first move while the leaders are waiting for the family. Take the initiative and encourage the start of a conversation.

Interacting with a person with a disability

- Relax. It's normal to feel unsure. Just be yourself and allow a space for the person with a disability to be himself or herself.
- Learn about **disability etiquette** (e.g., talk to people with disabilities directly, not just to the people with them) and **people-first language** (e.g., "people with disabilities," not "the disabled."). See: *Disability Etiquette* and *Talking About Disabilities* resources on reverse.
- Realize that a disability is neither a gift nor a curse—it just is.

What might a congregational care committee do for an individual with a disability and a family?

- Determine and discuss the "vision" of the individual and the family regarding their connection within the larger faith community.
- Encourage an individual's involvement in parts of the worship service (e.g., usher, reader) and on committees. Assist in making connections between the individual's gifts for service and the needs of the community.
- Keep communication open: ask for input, suggestions, and the sharing of family expertise in all areas that intersect with the faith community.
- Assist in building a supportive community around a person with a disability and their family, which may include encouraging relationships with religious leaders and educators, volunteers, peer buddies, and other congregants who will be friends with the family. These relationships will be supportive connections that encourage full participation in the life of the community.
- Coordinate volunteers who will support persons with disabilities during church activities or as respite care for families.
- Coordinate the concrete care often given to families with "typical" needs (i.e., the offering of a meal, looking after siblings).
- Help families make connections with appropriate disability service agencies.

How can a congregational care committee educate a community on disabilities?

- Ask the person with a disability and/or their family to share specific information with the congregation at large (e.g., during a sermon about the diversity of the community).
- Coordinate educational opportunities for religious education staff and for the community on topics such as inclusion, disability awareness and etiquette, and person-first language.
- Take on the responsibility of educating other faith community groups about common barriers and successful accommodations to participation. Learn and then share your insights.

See reverse for resources

Inclusion in a Faith Community

TIPS AND RESOURCES FOR CONGREGATIONAL CARE COMMITTEES

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Brochures

The Tennessee Disability Coalition has developed two outstanding brochures that are free and available for download:

Disability Etiquette and *Talking About Disabilities*
www.tndisability.org/news/2009/03/19/etiquette

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See also:

- *Inclusion in a Faith Community: Tips and Resources for Faith Leaders*
- *Inclusion in a Faith Community: Tips and Resources for Families*
- *Inclusion in a Faith Community: Tips and Resources for Religious Educators*



Inclusion in a Faith Community

TIPS AND RESOURCES FOR RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL LEADERS

What can I be aware of as I interact with individuals with disabilities and their families?

Attitudes in the faith community are largely shaped by its leadership. An attitude of openness and a desire to be supportive and inclusive of individuals with disabilities and their families is built upon the awareness that the ministering occurring is reciprocal. While you are ministering to the individual and their family, they also are ministering to you. You are learning together. With this in mind, a stance that is sensitive and welcoming to a person with a disability and their family:

- Acknowledges that persons with disabilities are *persons* first and foremost. They are not their disability. Their lives are not clinical diagnostic categories nor adjectives. They are not “disabled,” “autistic,” or “wheelchair bound.” They are “people with disabilities.” He is an “individual with autism,” and she is a “person who uses a wheelchair.”
- Treats adults with disabilities as adults. Speak directly to the person with a disability, not just to the people who accompany them.
- Understands that there is a tension between recognizing that all people share much in common and that persons with disabilities have special needs. While all people have various limitations, it is not the same as saying everyone has a disability.
- Is aware that persons with disabilities may have “special” needs, but they also have “typical” needs. Graduations, work placements, and all the milestones of life are joyful occasions that call for recognition.
- Realizes that anger and frustration about having a disability might be present. Recognizing anger and giving it credibility allows for the process of healing. The individual’s or the family’s faith may be tested, and they may have questions about the role of religion in their lives.
- Knows that a disability is neither a gift nor a curse—it just is.
- Is aware that persons with disabilities bring more to a faith community than “pastoral concerns” and needs; they have value and bring gifts and graces that enhance the life of the community.

Why are individuals with disabilities so often absent from faith communities?

Absence from a community may be due to a sense of feeling unwelcome or to the great effort attendance incurs, rather than a lack of need or desire for a community. Become aware of five common barriers that prevent individuals with disabilities and their families from fully participating in a faith community (Carter, 2007):



- *Architectural barriers* that do not allow individuals with physical disabilities to navigate the space.
- *Attitudinal barriers* based in a community’s fears and misunderstandings about disabilities.
- *Communication barriers* such as sight and sound that disallow participation.
- *Programmatic barriers* that do not allow individuals with disabilities an opportunity to share their gifts and talents with the community.
- *Liturgical barriers* such as sacraments or rituals that may not be adapted to meet individual needs.

How might I, as a faith leader, contribute to the relationship?

Too often, families wait for religious leaders and educators to make a first move while the leaders are waiting for the family. Take the initiative by asking an open-ended question such as: “Tell me your faith story.” This allows for an elaboration of the role of faith for the family and can be a catalyst for holding a conversation about the individual’s and/or family’s hope for inclusion. Ask about the interests and gifts of the members with disabilities and then find ways for these interests and gifts to be shared in the community. Check in periodically.

Remember: It is not necessary to always know what to do. It is your presence and willingness to stand with the family in grief, in hope, and in all that is between that is important. You can discover solutions and celebrate victories together.

Certainly, these suggestions are not exhaustive. Hopefully, they will spark ideas and supplement your own creativity as you seek ways to minister with persons with disabilities and their families within your faith community.

Please see reverse for resources



VANDERBILT KENNEDY CENTER
FOR EXCELLENCE IN DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

Inclusion in a Faith Community

Tips and Resources for Religious and Spiritual Leaders

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Web Resource Links

The National Library Service offers direction on ordering bibles and other sacred texts in special media, including Braille, audio, and large print. See:
<http://loc.gov/nls/reference/circulars/bibles.html>

On the Road to Congregational Inclusion: Dimensions of Faith and Congregational Ministries with Persons with Developmental Disabilities and Their Families is a bibliography of resources for clergy, laypersons, families, and service providers. It is available online. See:
<http://rwjms2.umdj.edu/boggscenter/products/dimensions.htm>

Contact the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center
Nashville (615) 322-8240
Toll-Free (866) 936-VUKC [8852]
vkc.vumc.org
kc@vumc.org

See also:

- *Inclusion in a Faith Community: Tips and Resources for Congregational Care Committees*
- *Inclusion in a Faith Community: Tips and Resources for Families*
- *Inclusion in a Faith Community: Tips and Resources for Religious Educators*

The Roles of a Leader	
Advocacy	Be a mediator and conflict resolver.
Attitude	Lead through example and focus on ability rather than disability.
Language	Be aware of people first language and use language that affirms rather than diminishes.
Physical accessibility	Ask if the building is accessible and if the person has the physical supports necessary to participate.
Programming and participation	Be a leader in asking the person to participate in worship, religious education, and social/outreach programming.
Communication	Be a leader in asking straight-forward questions and addressing issues that might take away from inclusion.
Spiritual formation	Be a leader in nurturing the person's spirituality in the same ways that you would any other member.
Education	Be a leader in doing what it takes to include the person in religious education by either adapting materials, contacting the right people, or finding the right resources.

Guide for Faith Partners
A faith partner is:
<input type="checkbox"/> a mediator and conflict resolver
<input type="checkbox"/> a leader through example by focusing on ability rather than disability, and modeling a good attitude
<input type="checkbox"/> aware of people first language
<input type="checkbox"/> aware of issues of physical accessibility
<input type="checkbox"/> a guide and helper with programming and participation in worship, religious education, and social/outreach opportunities
<input type="checkbox"/> a communication guide who is available to talk to members of the congregation and is a regular conversation partner for the person with a disability
<input type="checkbox"/> a spiritual guide who nurtures the person's spirituality in the same ways that a person would any other friend
<input type="checkbox"/> an educator who gives help and answers questions before, after, or during classes or studies
<input type="checkbox"/> a friend during social opportunities by inviting, offering rides, and engaging in conversations

Inclusion Plan Describe plans and adaptations that will be used to include the person in congregational life.			
Activities	What will involvement look like?	What supports and adaptations will be needed for participation?	Who will carry out this part of the plan?
Small group activities			
Large group activities			
Worship services			
Rituals, Sacraments, or other community traditions			
Service, outreach, social opportunities			
Faith partner			
Other			

Covenant Outline
<input type="checkbox"/> What is being promised?
<input type="checkbox"/> How will the goal be accomplished?
<input type="checkbox"/> When will you meet again?
<input type="checkbox"/> Who is part of the covenant?

Example Covenant
<input type="checkbox"/> We will work together to carry out this plan to include (name).
<input type="checkbox"/> We will pray for each other, follow the plan, and talk to each other about problems and successes.
<input type="checkbox"/> We will meet again (date).
<input type="checkbox"/> Names/signatures of team members, including the person with a disability.

Inclusion Plan				
Describe plans and adaptations that will be used to include the person in congregational life.				
Activities	What did involvement look like?	What supports and adaptations were needed for participation?	Who carried out this part of the plan?	Are there changes to be made?
Small group activities				
Large group activities				
Worship services				
Rituals, Sacraments, or other community traditions				
Service, outreach, social opportunities				
Faith partner				
Other				

Meeting Questionnaire				
Team Member	Strengths of the Plan	Weaknesses of the Plan	What should stay the same?	What should change?

Disability Organizations List

❑ www.aaiddreligion.org/resources

Resources put out by the Religion & Spirituality Division of the AAIDD, and Links to Other Resources.

❑ www.aucd.org

The Association of University Centers on Disabilities is a network of Interdisciplinary Centers working to improve the lives of individuals with disabilities and their families. There is a University Center of Excellence (UCEDD) in every state. UCEDDs may be a valuable resource for resources and referral.

❑ www.faithability.org

This website links to various resources on disability and religion.

❑ www.religionanddisability.org

The Center for Religion and Disability's primary focus areas include people with disabilities and the total learning environment, building community supports, and strategic planning and consultation.

❑ www.loc.gov/nls/reference/circulars/bibles.html

This site gives links for finding Bibles and other sacred texts in special media, including Braille, audio, and large print.

❑ familypathfinder.org

Tennessee Disability Pathfinder helps families and agencies find useful disability services and resources and includes a section on disability and religion with links to many websites, national disability organizations, and recommendations for books, articles, and journals.

Inclusion Review		
Setting: _____	Date: _____	Name: _____
Was _____ (person's name) involved?		
Which supports and adaptations worked?		
Which supports and adaptations did not work?		
Who carried out the planning?		
Comments:		

Written materials	Visual impairments	Hearing impairments	Physical disabilities
Outline important points.	Seat the person close to the speaker.	Seat the person close to the speaker.	Ask the person if they want assistance before giving it.
Make the text larger and use an easy-to-read font	Say the person's name before speaking to them	Get the person's attention before speaking to them.	Try to communicate directly with the person and at eye level.
Give visual cues by allowing space between sentences that end and begin thoughts or concepts.	Have materials available in a different format such as Braille or audio.	Look directly at the person to whom you are speaking.	Arrange an educational space ahead of time to make space for a wheelchair or to provide necessary accommodations.
Simplify the wording. Make the language as concrete as possible.	Avoid overusing visual teaching methods such as powerpoint, pictures or images, and videos.	Do not speak too quickly or cover your mouth when speaking so that the person can lip read.	Choose a meeting space that is easy to get to and near an accessible bathroom.
Use a highlighter to call attention to what is most important.		Talk directly to the person even if they do not understand.	Think creatively; most materials can be physically adapted to accommodate physical disabilities.
Changes should either be changes that will make sense in the context of the whole group or follow along very closely.			

Determining the Cause of Problem Behavior		
Name: _____	Date: _____	Setting: _____
What happened before?		
What does the problem behavior look like?		
What happened after?		
What is the purpose of the behavior?		
Possible solutions for changing the behavior:		

Interacting with People with Disabilities
<input type="checkbox"/> Always talk to the person directly; do not talk about them to someone else.
<input type="checkbox"/> Put the person first and the disability second. For example, say “the woman who is blind” rather than “the blind woman.”
<input type="checkbox"/> Do not unnecessarily avoid the subject of disability.
<input type="checkbox"/> Use concrete language and avoid sarcasm.
<input type="checkbox"/> Avoid being patronizing, condescending, or treating the person like a child.
<input type="checkbox"/> Be direct in your communications.

Disability Etiquette: Engaging People With Disabilities

DISABILITY ETIQUETTE:

ENGAGING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Don't let fear and uncertainty keep you from getting to know people with disabilities. Fear of the unknown and lack of knowledge about interacting can lead to uneasiness when meeting a person who has a disability.

Remember: a person with a disability is a person with feelings. Treat him or her as you would want to be treated, and then let common sense and friendship break down any barriers you may encounter.



T E N N E S S E E

D I S A B I L I T Y

C O A L I T I O N



INSIDE:

- Meeting a person with a disability
- Engaging a person who uses a wheelchair
- Meeting someone with a cognitive impairment
- And more ...

Meeting a person with a disability

1. **A handshake is NOT a standard greeting for everyone.** When in doubt, ASK the person whether he or she would like to shake hands with you. A smile along with a spoken greeting is always appropriate.
2. **Speak directly to the person with a disability,** not just to persons who may be accompanying him or her.
3. **Don't mention the person's disability,** unless he or she talks about it or it is relevant to the conversation.
4. **Treat adults as adults.** Don't patronize or talk down to people with disabilities. Likewise, don't lavish praise on a person with a disability for having the "courage" to overcome a disability.
5. **Be patient and give your undivided attention,** especially with someone who speaks slowly or with great effort.
6. **Never pretend to understand what a person is saying.** Ask the person to repeat or rephrase.
7. **It is okay to use common expressions** like "see you soon" or "I'd better be running along."
8. **Relax. We all make mistakes.** Offer an apology if you forget some courtesy. Keep a sense of humor and a willingness to communicate.

Interacting with a wheelchair user

1. **Personal space** – Do not push, lean on, or hold onto a person's wheelchair unless the person asks you to. The wheelchair is part of his or her personal space.
2. **Eye-to-Eye** – Try to put yourself at eye level when talking with someone in a wheelchair. Sit or kneel in front of the person.
3. **Clear a path** – Rearrange furniture or objects to accommodate a wheelchair before the person arrives.
4. **Know the geography** – If asked, know where someone can find accessible restrooms, telephones, and water fountains in the building.
5. **Directions** – When giving directions to a person in a wheelchair, consider distance, weather conditions, and physical obstacles (curbs, stairs, steep hills, etc.).



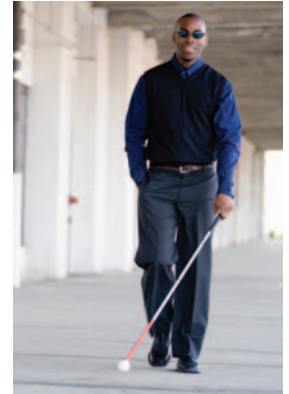
Meeting someone with a cognitive impairment that affects learning, intelligence, or brain function

1. **Keep your communication simple.** Use short sentences and rephrase comments or questions for better clarity.
2. **Stay on point** by focusing on one topic at a time.
3. **Allow the person time** to respond, ask questions and clarify your comments.
4. **Focus on the person** as he or she responds to you and pay attention to body language.
5. **Repetition.** If appropriate, repeat back any messages to confirm mutual understanding.



Engaging someone who is blind or has a disability that affects vision

1. **Greetings** – When meeting the person, identify yourself and introduce others who may be present.
2. **Departing** – Don't leave the person without excusing yourself first.
3. **Guiding** – When asked to guide someone, never push or pull the person. Offer your arm and allow him or her to reach for you, then walk slightly ahead. Point out doors, stairs, and curbs as you approach them.
4. **The landscape** – As you guide a person into a room, describe the layout, the location of furniture, and note who else is nearby.
5. **Details matter** – Be specific when describing the location of objects. (Example: "There is a chair three feet from you at eleven o'clock.")
6. **Guide dogs** – Don't pet or distract a guide dog. The dog is responsible for its owner's safety and is always working. It is not a pet.



Meeting a person with a disability that affects speech

1. **Pay attention, be patient, and wait** for the person to complete a word or thought. Do not finish it for the person.
2. **Ask the person to repeat what is said** if you do not understand. Tell the person what you heard and see if it is close to what he or she is saying.
3. **Be prepared for persons who use assistive technology** to enhance or augment speech. Don't be afraid to communicate with someone who uses an alphabet board or a computer to communicate.



Communicating with someone who is deaf or uses an assisted hearing device

1. **Let the person take the lead** in establishing the communication mode, such as lip-reading, sign language, or writing notes.
2. **Talk directly to the person** even when a sign language interpreter is present.
3. **If the person lip-reads**, face him or her directly, speak clearly and with a moderate pace.
4. **With some people** it may help to simplify your sentences and use more facial expressions and body language.



Service animals

1. **It takes all kinds** – Service animals come in all shapes and sizes. In addition to the traditional guide dog, a variety of dogs and other service animals may detect seizures before they occur, enhance therapies for children with autism, provide a calming presence for adults, or assist with a wide range of daily living activities.
2. **Engaging animal** – A service animal is a physical extension of a person with a disability and is there to work. It may be tempting to pet or call for a service animal's attention. However, for the safety and well-being of the team ask permission from the service animal's owner first.
3. **Questions** – The law varies widely so if you have a specific question, please contact the Tennessee Disability Coalition.



Using appropriate language

Life for most people with mental or physical disabilities has vastly improved over the past forty years. However, some things have been slow to change; namely, attitudes and perceptions about people with disabilities. The use of outdated language and words to describe people with disabilities contributes to perpetuating old stereotypes.

If public opinion about people with disabilities is to evolve, then awareness and usage of more appropriate language needs to become part of everyday discourse.

1. **Disability relevance** – Do not refer to a person's disability unless it is relevant to a situation or discussion.
2. **Disability vs. handicap** – The use of the word "handicap" is considered offensive, and the preferred term is "disability." Generally, it is only acceptable to use "handicap" when referring to accommodations such as handicap parking, although accessible parking is preferred today.
3. **People first language** – Say "person with a disability" rather than a "disabled person." This emphasizes that individuals with disabilities are people first and thus should not be defined by their disability.
4. **Referencing groups** – Avoid referring to a group of individuals as the disabled, quadriplegics, or the retarded. Instead, use references such as "persons with a disability," "persons with quadriplegia," and "persons with an intellectual disability." An exception involves people who are deaf and prefer the phrase "The Deaf."
5. **Negative and sensational descriptions** – Do not say "suffers from," "a victim of," "afflicted with," or "crippled." Never say "invalid." These portrayals elicit unwanted sympathy, or worse, pity toward individuals with disabilities.
6. **Gratuitous, but well-meaning praise** – Don't portray people with disabilities as overly courageous, brave, special, or superhuman because they have "overcome" a disability. Doing so implies that it is unusual for people with disabilities to have talents, skills, and the ability to contribute in society.
7. **Wheelchairs and adaptive technology** – Never say "wheelchair-bound" or "confined to a wheelchair." People use mobility or adaptive equipment as tools of greater independence.
8. **Presume competence** – Never assume that a person who looks or speaks differently has a cognitive disability.

TALKING ABOUT DISABILITY

The preferred “people first language” recognizes that someone is a person first, and that the disability is a part of, but not the whole person. However, some people with disabilities reject use of people first language. These guidelines have developed independently within distinct disability communities, and they may sometimes appear contradictory. For example, some persons with reduced vision find the term “visually-impaired” acceptable, but some persons with reduced hearing find the term “hearing-impaired” offensive and prefer “hard of hearing.”

WORDS & PHRASES TO AVOID

PREFERRED ALTERNATIVES

a disabled person

person with a disability

the handicapped or the crippled

person with a disability

normal, healthy or
able-bodied person/people

people without disabilities
typical person

wheelchair-bound or
confined to a wheelchair

a wheelchair user
uses a wheelchair

birth defect or affliction

congenital disability or birth anomaly

a victim of cerebral palsy
(or other condition)

has cerebral palsy
has (insert condition)

suffers from polio, afflicted with
polio or post-polios

has had polio, experienced polio
has a disability due to polio

mentally retarded, a retard
slow or special

person with an intellectual or
developmental disability

the Down's person or Mongoloid

person with Down Syndrome

the epileptic or epileptics
fits or epileptic fits

person with epilepsy
person with a seizure disorder
seizure or epileptic episode

the mentally ill
crazy, psycho, nuts, mental case

people who have mental illness
person with a mental
or emotional disorder

the blind or blind as a bat

people who are blind
or visually impaired

hearing-impaired
deaf-mute, deaf and dumb

person who is hard of hearing
the Deaf, a person who is deaf

COMMON COURTESIES FOR ENGAGING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

1. **Personal Questions** – Avoid asking personal questions about someone's disability. If you must ask, be sensitive and show respect. Do not probe if the person declines to discuss it.
2. **Patience** – It may take extra time for a person with a disability to do or say something.
3. **Offering Assistance** – Be polite and friendly when offering assistance and wait until your offer is accepted. Listen or ask for specific instructions.
4. **Meetings & Events** – Create an environment that is welcoming to everyone. Anticipate specific accommodations that a person with a disability or group might need and contact them for information on how to best meet their needs.

ABOUT THE TENNESSEE DISABILITY COALITION

The Coalition is an alliance of organizations and individuals who have joined to promote the full and equal participation of men, women and children with disabilities in all aspects of life. We work together to advocate for public policy that ensures self-determination, independence, empowerment, and inclusion for people with disabilities in areas such as accessibility, education, health care, housing, and voting rights.

Organizational Membership – If your organization would like to join the Coalition, then please give us a call at the phone number below or contact our Executive Director at coalition@tndisability.org

Individual Membership – If you would like to join the Coalition as a member of our Disability Action Network, please give us a call at the phone number below or contact a member of our Public Policy Team at news@tndisability.org.



TENNESSEE DISABILITY COALITION
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