



Disability Etiquette

Respecting People with Disabilities

#5

Ways to Welcome People with Disabilities into Your Church

For people with disabilities, taking part in church life can be difficult.

A person with disabilities goes to church to learn about Jesus and find a God-centered community. They desire to be seen as an equal part to the body of Christ, not someone broken that needs to be fixed. All are created in God's image (**Genesis 1:12**) and all are fearfully and wonderfully made (**Psalms 139:14**).

Here are some tips to making people with disabilities feel welcome into your Church:

1. Get to Know Them

Welcoming people with disabilities is less about having special programming and more about gracious and compassionate people who look for ways to be inclusive and accommodating.

Ask the family how you can best serve them and you can also invite them to Sabbath lunch at your home! This extends fellowship to them that pulls them out of isolation.

2. Become More Accessible

Accessibility is vital for those who are physically disabled or need wheelchair assistance to be able to attend church. If you have to go up steps to access the restroom, any member who cannot go up and down a set of stairs will not be able to use the restroom. For the person with mobility issues, restroom accessibility may be the deciding factor in attending church or not.

Churches can create wider aisles for those moments when members are invited to come up to the front of the church, so that wheelchair users will have the space to make their way up. It may be possible to even designate a deacon or usher to go to

the seats of wheelchair users to serve them communion or to pray with them, so they don't miss out on practicing their faith.

Seating is another important accessibility issue. Make sure there are rows available for those who are physically disabled to sit next to their family. Use chairs that can be easily moved around if room needs to be made for a wheelchair.

Reserved parking spaces, ramp entrances, a volunteer to open doors, and larger restroom stalls are other ways to make churches more accessible. In the long run, helping a wheelchair user feel at ease navigating church will make it possible for them to keep coming back every week.

For blind church-goers, allowing them to set up a time outside of Sabbath to get familiar with the building will help them learn to navigate it themselves with confidence. Therefore, giving them a greater chance at feeling safe and empowered to come regularly.

Braille and/or large print Bibles and bulletins could be made available for the visually impaired or blind.

It may be beneficial to have a committed volunteer who knows ASL. This makes it much easier for deaf people to attend events a church offers, to be trained in God's word, and to become part of the church family by removing the language barrier.

3. Be Creative

When planning programmes for church, think of family activities that a child with disabilities can take part in. Sometimes you may need to sacrifice your preferences but think of what it means to a family with such limited options to have that opportunity for inclusive family fellowship!

4. Earn Parents' Trust

When inviting parents to send their child to Sabbath School, keep in mind that children with disabilities have various special needs and potential health issues that make it very hard for parents to feel able to leave them with even well-meaning people who offer their help. Parents can also feel guilty for taking you up on your offer because they know it won't be easy for you. Don't take a onetime offer as enough! Offer again! When possible, offer to come and spend time with their child while they are home so you can get to know them and earn their trust. It will mean the world to them!

5. Teach the Children at Church to Befriend Children That are Different From Them

Regardless of their level of cognition, kids love when people include them, talk to them and spend time with them. The importance of parents teaching their children to have compassion and be intentional in this effort cannot be emphasized enough. Jesus Himself, spoke of the importance of loving the “least of these” ([Matthew 25:40](#)). Don’t let the children miss out on this opportunity of mutual blessing and the ability to grow in Christ-like character!

6. Provide Support for the Families

Provide meals and other support for the family from time to time, but especially when they are going through a difficult time of health issues.

7. Look for Ways to Allow People with Disabilities to Serve

People who attend church naturally want to get connected to others and have the chance to serve and make a positive impact. Everyone has unique giftings and character traits that can be a blessing to the church body. One issue to consider is how a church makes it possible for people with disabilities to get involved. Make sure that they, too, have ministry options available to them and that they are encouraged to participate. Whatever their disability, most are ready and willing to serve, if they know there are opportunities and ways for them to get involved.

Speak directly to church members with disabilities to learn their unique needs and preferences that will make it possible for them to keep attending church, get involved, and ultimately, deepen their relationship with Christ. Whichever adjustments the church is able to invest in and make will certainly be welcomed and valued by those with disabilities.

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Resources: [8 Ways to Welcome People with Disabilities into Your Church - The Gospel Coalition | Canada](#) , [5 Ways the Church Can Reach People with Disabilities - Topical Studies \(biblestudytools.com\)](#)