

20 Practical Things Pastors and Churches Can Do To Make Families and Children with Disabilities Feel Welcome¹

1. Greet them – be welcoming; act as if you are truly happy to see the child and call him/her by name
2. Include the child in church activities
3. Do not judge the child for his/her behavior when the behavior is the result of his/her disability
4. Pray for the family
5. Do not be afraid to interact with the child, even if the child is non-verbal
6. Do observe the personal space of a child, especially a child with autism (i.e., some autistic children do not like to be hugged or touched – talk to the parents first)
7. Do talk to the parents about their child and ask what you can do to help
8. It is NOT helpful to talk to parents by telling them that God chose them to have this child because they were such strong people! It is better to say, “I do not understand why your child was born with this disability, but I do know that God will give you the strength and wisdom that you need as parents to raise him/her. We, as your church family, are here for you. We are praying for you. Please lean on us and tell us how we can help.”
9. A simple, “How is your child doing?” can go a long way to helping parents feel that you really care
10. Never say to a parent, “It could be worse,” when discussing their child being born with disabilities!
11. Have an annual Disability Awareness Sunday
12. Have training for staff and volunteers
13. Pastors are to receive training in disability awareness per the Book of Discipline
14. If there are other children in the family, give them extra attention
15. Remove barriers that make worship difficult for the child with disabilities
16. Talk to the parents about the needs of the child so that everyone at the church who works with the child knows how best to teach the child or what to do in case of an emergency
17. If needed, find a responsible older youth to be a “buddy” for the child with disabilities
18. Educate the children in the church about different disabilities (children’s moments; Sunday School, etc.)
19. If the disability is severe and the family has to miss church for an extended period of time, offer respite care (offer to baby-sit; offer to cook a meal; etc.)
20. Complete an annual Accessibility Audit as required by the Book of Discipline

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