



# Welcoming Neurodivergent People to Church

## 1. First Contact

- Greet the person warmly and without pressure for eye contact — follow their lead.
- Use clear, straightforward language.
- If they seem unsure or overwhelmed, offer gentle

guidance:

- **“Would you like me to show you where things are?”**
- Avoid sudden touch; give space and time for processing.
- If they are with a companion or support worker, still speak directly to them.

## 2. Offering Help

- Ask before offering assistance — needs vary widely.
- Offer options such as:
  - “Would you like a quiet place to sit?”
  - “Would it help to know the order of the service?”
  - “Would you prefer written information?”
- Respect their communication style — spoken words, gestures, devices, or none.
- If they decline help, accept this without comment.

## 3. Communication Tips

- Use clear, concrete language; avoid idioms or metaphors
- Give information one step at a time.
- Allow extra processing time — silence is not a problem.
- If they don’t understand, rephrase simply rather than repeat louder.
- Avoid sensory overload: reduce background noise where possible and speak calmly.
- Provide written or visual information to support understanding.

## 4. Seating

- Ask where they would feel most comfortable.

- Many neurodivergent people prefer:
  - A quiet or low-sensory area
  - Space to move or fidget without feeling observed
  - A clear view of the front
  - Easy access to exits if they need a break
- Let them know if your church offers:
  - A quiet room or sensory-friendly space
  - Ear defenders
  - Printed service sheets
  - Visual schedules or service outlines

## 5. During the Service

- Explain what will happen next, especially if the service includes movement or changes in lighting or sound.
- Avoid sudden loud noises where possible; give a brief warning if something may be startling.
- If using screens, keep slides simple and avoid fast transitions.
- Make it clear that standing, sitting, or moving around is optional.
- If something changes unexpectedly, offer a quick verbal or visual cue.

## 6. Communion & Movement

- Explain the pattern of movement clearly and calmly.
- Offer choices:
  - Coming forward
  - Receiving communion in their seat
  - Having someone accompany them if they wish
- Use simple gestures or pointing if helpful.
- Allow extra time for transitions — don't rush.
- If they use a communication device, pause so they can respond.

## 7. After the Service

- Busy, noisy spaces can be overwhelming — offer a quieter area for conversation.

- Ask if they would like help navigating refreshments or finding someone.
- Introduce others clearly:
  - **“This is Max — he helps with the welcome team.”**
- Avoid small talk pressure; keep communication simple and respectful.
- If they need to leave suddenly, don’t take it personally — it may be sensory overload.

## 8. Emergency Situations

- Give clear, calm instructions.
- Use simple gestures or visual cues to indicate evacuation.
- Avoid shouting unless it is absolutely necessary.
- Guide them to a quieter, safe space outside and stay with them until they feel settled.
- If they have a companion or support worker, coordinate with them.

## 9. Please Avoid

- ✗ Forcing eye contact
- ✗ Touching without permission
- ✗ Using vague instructions like “over there”
- ✗ Assuming behaviour is rudeness — it may be sensory overload
- ✗ Overloading with information all at once
- ✗ Saying “It’s not a big deal” when something feels overwhelming
- ✗ Drawing attention to stimming, fidgeting, or movement

## 10. Remember

**Clarity ~ Calm ~ Choice**

Neurodivergent people thrive when communication is clear, expectations are predictable, and their choices are respected.

Follow their lead, reduce pressure, and create a space where everyone can worship comfortably and authentically.