

Quick Low Cost Things to Make a Difference for People with an ASD and Everyone in your Congregation

Welcoming those with Autism and Asperger Syndrome

Guidelines by Ann Memmott

The Diocese of Oxford, United Kingdom

1. Check the **lights in each room**, especially fluorescent ones – any flickering ones? Please replace them. (This also helps people with epilepsy)
2. **Noise** levels. Is there anything unexpected in today's service/meeting? Can it be changed easily? If not, can you warn us? (This also helps people with mental health conditions and those who are deaf)
3. The **building**. Do we know what it looks like, and what the **layout** is like today? Is information on a simple website, perhaps? (This also helps people who have visual disabilities or those who are nervous of attending somewhere new)
4. The **Order of service** – really clear **instructions** for us e.g. where to sit, when to stand and sit, what to say at each point? Either write it down, or get someone to be with us to quietly say what to do, please. (This also helps those new to church). Different colour paper may help some to read service sheets, e.g. light blue paper rather than white.
5. We are very **literal**, and our minds may see pictures, not words. If you need to use complicated language, can someone be available to explain it afterwards if we need it, maybe by email? (This helps those who find reading more difficult, too, which is one in every five people in the UK)
6. **Physical** events e.g. **shaking hands**? Water being splashed about? We may find this physically painful, as we're hypersensitive. Please warn us what will happen, and avoid physical contact unless we offer first. (This also helps those with arthritis, and those who are nervous of being touched because of memories of violence)
7. **Rest** area – somewhere quiet to go if we need to, please. Or don't worry if we wander outside for a while. (This also helps people who have chronic fatigue illnesses, and mental health conditions for example, as well as those with back problems who may need a quick lie-down on a bench)
8. **Socializing**. Be aware we find it difficult and exhausting as we cannot 'see' or hear you that well. Our **body language** can be different to yours, and we may not make **eye contact**. Please don't think we're rude. (This also helps people who are more introverted).
9. **Be Clear and Accurate**. If you say you'll do something, please do it. Those on the autistic spectrum will always find it very distressing if you promise to help and don't, or promise to phone at a certain time and don't, or if you use expressions like "I'll be back in five minutes" when you mean, "I'll be back some time this afternoon". If you need to change arrangements, please just let us know.
10. **Support**: Find a quiet caring person to be aware of us, someone ready to lend a little assistance if we need it. Brief them well, and please respect our confidentiality and privacy.