



How To

Welcome people with SEND

Trish Hahn is a member of our Specialist Support team and is available to offer advice on SEND to Messy Church teams. Trish has over 13 years of experience leading two Special Educational Needs & Disabilities Messy Churches, previously in Hertfordshire and currently in northeast Essex. Here are Trish's 'top tips' for being a welcoming and inclusive Messy Church for people with SEND.

The welcome

- Have a friendly meet and greet person at your entrance.
- Do not be surprised if your visitors are unchurched – you may be the face of church they meet for the first time, smile!
- Welcome every member of the family, whether or not they have additional needs.
- Look beyond the disability and see the child, teen or adult. Enjoy the uniqueness of each person and look for Jesus in them.
- Speak directly to the person as well as to their carer. Get down to their height level, if you can, especially if they are in a wheelchair. Some guests may feel uncomfortable with direct eye contact, but may still be listening to you.
- Sensitively seek advice from parents/carers as to how you can offer assistance. Any assistance you give should be offered, not forced.

Communication

- Keep language simple and concise.
- Use Makaton pictures around your space (e.g. to signpost the toilets) and Makaton signs during the celebration.
- Use of a picture timetable is a great inclusive resource for those guests who like routine and who like to know what activities are happening now and next. Picture timetables are also a functional communication tool for those guests who are non-verbal or have limited speech.
- Surprises may not be welcome: consider whether some individuals may need preparing for something unexpected that breaks the routine, especially sudden loud noises.

Sensory play

- Sensory play supports brain development and enhances memory and problem solving. It also supports language development and communication and social skills.
- It is inclusive, calming, therapeutic, educational and, best of all, fun!
- Sensory toys do not have to be expensive – try pound shops or charity shops for a wide selection.
- Sensory trays can be themed around the church calendar or your Messy Church Bible story.
- Use your space wisely, if possible, find room for a quiet space/blackout pop-up tent.
- If possible, have several pairs of ear defenders available for visitors young and older with sensitive hearing.

And finally... Keep it short, keep it simple and keep it interactive, visual and sensory. Above all, have fun and enjoy much laughter while teaching your visitors about God!