

# Adult Belonging Guide

**Belonging doesn't age out**



Kids with Down syndrome grow up. Today, many adults with Down syndrome live into their 60s. They want what every adult wants: friends, a purpose, a place to serve, and a faith of their own. This guide helps your church make room for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities in every part of church life.

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# Six age-respectful principles

Many churches do a great job with kids with disabilities, then have nothing for them at 18 or 21. Families often leave church at this stage. Let's change that.

## Treat adults as adults

Use adult language, a normal tone of voice, and adult materials. Skip kids' coloring pages, baby talk, and "cute" comments.

## Same room first

Adults with disabilities belong in the main service, small groups, and serving teams, with supports. A separate class can be a great *extra*, but not the only option.

## Ask them, not just their caregiver

Talk directly to the person. Ask what they want to do, what they enjoy, and what help they'd like.

## Friends, not projects

The goal is real friendship in both directions. Adults with disabilities give as much as they receive.

## Everyone can serve

Every believer has gifts to share. Find the role that fits, then give the support needed to do it well.

## Grow at every age

Faith keeps growing. Offer Bible study, prayer, and discipleship that fit how each person learns.

## WORDS THAT RESPECT ADULTS

- "Adults with intellectual disabilities," not "kids" or "special kids"
- Avoid "forever young" or "childlike"
- Use their name and adult titles, like anyone else
- Talk about their work, hobbies, and relationships

**"The LORD does not see as man does. For man sees the outward appearance, but the LORD sees the heart."**

1 Samuel 16:7 (BSB)

## ADULT LIFE TODAY

Many adults with Down syndrome and other intellectual disabilities work, volunteer, take college classes, live on their own or with support, date and marry, vote, and lead. Expect adult lives, and plan church life to match.

## QUICK CHECK: HOW ARE WE DOING?

- ☐ Do adults with disabilities attend our main service?
- ☐ Is anyone with a disability serving on a team?
- ☐ Is there a small group or Bible study they can join?
- ☐ Do youth with disabilities have a plan for after graduation?
- ☐ Could each adult name two friends at church?

EVERYONE CAN SERVE

# Serving roles menu

Match roles to the person's interests and strengths, not just to what seems "easy." Start with a trial month, then check in.

| ROLE                                | WHAT IT INVOLVES                                                 | SUPPORTS THAT HELP                                             |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Greeter / welcome team</b>       | Welcome people at the door, hand out bulletins                   | A script card, a buddy for the first few weeks, a name tag     |
| <b>Usher</b>                        | Help people find seats, pass the offering, hand out sensory bags | Task-step card, a set spot, a partner                          |
| <b>Coffee &amp; hospitality</b>     | Set up, serve, and clean the coffee station                      | Picture checklist, labeled supplies, a partner                 |
| <b>Worship team</b>                 | Sing, play an instrument, or help with slides or lights          | Recorded practice tracks, lyric sheets, a mentor               |
| <b>Reading Scripture or praying</b> | Read or pray in the service or a group                           | Practice ahead, large print, pictures, or a shared reading     |
| <b>Setup &amp; tear-down</b>        | Chairs, tables, signs, and supplies                              | Room diagram, a simple list, a team leader                     |
| <b>Kids' ministry helper</b>        | Help with crafts, snacks, music, or games                        | Paired with a screened adult, per your child-protection policy |
| <b>Card &amp; prayer ministry</b>   | Write cards, make calls, pray for requests                       | Pre-addressed cards, sample messages, a prayer list            |
| <b>Tech &amp; media</b>             | Take photos, run slides, help with the livestream                | Step-by-step card, practice time, a mentor                     |
| <b>Outreach &amp; missions</b>      | Pack care kits, serve meals, help at events                      | Visual steps, a buddy, a clear job                             |

## FIND THE FIT

- What do you enjoy?
- What are you good at?
- Do you like people, or behind-the-scenes?
- Morning, midweek, or events?

## SET THEM UP TO SUCCEED

- A task-step card (next page)
- A partner or mentor
- A trial month, then a check-in
- Thank them, just like every volunteer

## A NOTE ON SCREENING

Adults with disabilities who serve with children follow the same screening and child-protection policy as every volunteer, with any help they need to complete it.

PRINTABLE

# Role & task-step cards

Break any role into 4-6 simple steps with a picture for each. The top card is an example; use the blank one for any role. Draw, paste a photo, or use the picture cards from the Adapted Kids Ministry Guides.



## My role: Greeter



Name: \_\_\_\_\_ My partner: \_\_\_\_\_

- |          |                                                                                     |                                                           |                          |
|----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>1</b> |    | Get my name tag and bulletins at the welcome desk         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>2</b> |    | Stand at the main door with my partner                    | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>3</b> |    | Smile and say, "Good morning! Welcome!"                   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>4</b> |    | Hand each person a bulletin; get a host if someone is new | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>5</b> |  | When the music starts, take my seat                       | <input type="checkbox"/> |

## My role: \_\_\_\_\_



Name: \_\_\_\_\_ My partner: \_\_\_\_\_

- |          |                                                                                          |       |                          |
|----------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|--------------------------|
| <b>1</b> | <div style="border: 1px dashed black; width: 50px; height: 50px; margin: 0 auto;"></div> | _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>2</b> | <div style="border: 1px dashed black; width: 50px; height: 50px; margin: 0 auto;"></div> | _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>3</b> | <div style="border: 1px dashed black; width: 50px; height: 50px; margin: 0 auto;"></div> | _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>4</b> | <div style="border: 1px dashed black; width: 50px; height: 50px; margin: 0 auto;"></div> | _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>5</b> | <div style="border: 1px dashed black; width: 50px; height: 50px; margin: 0 auto;"></div> | _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> |

GROW TOGETHER

# Bible study & small groups

A good accessible Bible study helps *everyone* understand, and it's often the best study in the church. Here's a simple 45-minute pattern.

## SAMPLE 45-MINUTE STUDY

- 1 Welcome & catch up (10 min)**  
Snacks, names, and "one good thing from your week."
- 2 Sing or pray (5 min)**  
A familiar song, and one person leads a short prayer.
- 3 The story (10 min)**  
Read a short passage (or tell it) with pictures, props, or acting it out. Read it twice.
- 4 Talk about it (10 min)**  
2–3 questions. Mix "what happened?" with "what does it mean for me?"
- 5 Live it (5 min)**  
One simple thing to do this week. Write or draw it on a card.
- 6 Pray for each other (5 min)**  
Share requests; everyone can pray aloud, silently, or with a picture card.

## TEACHING TIPS

- Use an easy-to-read Bible translation, and read aloud
- One main idea each week, repeated often
- Pictures, objects, and acting out stories
- Ask, then wait. Give time to answer.
- Never require anyone to read aloud
- Short, clear handouts in large print

## INCLUDING ADULTS IN ANY SMALL GROUP

- Invite personally, and offer a ride
- Pick a host home without stairs, if needed
- Share questions ahead of time
- Give everyone a role: snack, prayer, reading, hosting
- Keep in touch between meetings

## BAPTISM, COMMUNION, MEMBERSHIP & MORE

Whatever your church practices, include adults (and youth) with intellectual disabilities. Adapt the **preparation**, not the invitation: meet one-on-one or in a small group, use pictures and hands-on learning, keep sessions short, pair them with a mentor, and invite family. Focus on the person's trust in and love for Jesus, expressed in whatever way they communicate, rather than on reciting or passing a test. Plan the practical details together, too: steps, seating, what to expect, and a practice run.

## TRY IT: 1 SAMUEL 16:7 (GOD SEES THE HEART)

### What happened?

Samuel thought the tallest, strongest brother would be king. Who did God choose?

### What does it mean?

What does God look at when He looks at you?

### Live it

This week, notice one good thing in someone's heart and tell them.

FRIENDSHIP & GROWING UP

# Mentoring & the youth-to-adult move

Two things make the biggest difference for adults with disabilities: a friend who shows up, and a planned move from youth ministry to adult life at church.

## MENTORING & FRIENDSHIP

- Pair each adult with a mentor or friend of similar age or interests
- Meet for coffee, lunch, a walk, or an activity at least monthly
- Sit together at church, and introduce them to others
- Pray together, and read a short Bible passage if they'd like
- Mentors are friends, not caregivers. Keep it mutual

## CONVERSATION STARTERS

What do you like to do for fun?

What's your favorite song?

Tell me about your job or your week.

Who is in your family?

What do you want to learn about God?

How can I pray for you?

## YOUTH-TO-ADULT TIMELINE

1

### Age 16–17

Start talking with the family about adult ministry. Invite the youth to visit adult classes and serving teams.

2

### Age 17–18

Choose a bridge person, such as a mentor from the adult ministry, who connects with them for the year.

3

### Final year in youth

Try out a serving role and a small group. Celebrate the move like any graduation.

4

### First year as an adult

Bridge person checks in monthly. Adjust supports. Make sure they have at least 2–3 real friends at church.

## ALSO HELP WITH

- Rides to church and events
- Connection to local adult services and day programs
- Life-skills and job-skills ministries, if your church offers them
- Family support as parents age

**Our bridge person**

**Adult ministry leader**

**Next check-in date**

Scripture quotations are from the Berean Standard Bible (BSB), public domain.