

A Seat at the Table

Adapted Edition • Ages 13+ • For Down syndrome, autism & other disabilities



Everything in “A Seat at the Table” adapted so every teen can fully take part, including teens with Down syndrome, autism, or other disabilities. It includes a plain-language story, a chunked verse with signs, discussion supports, place cards with ready-made invitations, a teen-led Welcome Walk, a peer buddy guide, a visual schedule, a talk board, and a what-to-expect page.

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How to use the Adapted Edition

Teens with disabilities are full members of the youth group, not guests. Keep everything **age-respectful**, offer more than one way to respond, and give every teen a real role. Often the best Welcome Walk leader is a teen who has experienced the barriers firsthand.

Same message, different doors

Every child gets the same big idea and the same Bible story. Adapting changes **how** they access it, not **what** they learn.

Presume competence

Assume every child understands more than they can show. Talk to them directly, at their age, not over or about them.

Ask the family first

Parents are the experts. Use the All About Me page before your first session and follow their lead on language and supports.

Belonging over behavior

A child who stands, rocks, flaps, or takes breaks is still participating. The goal is belonging, not sitting perfectly still.

Adapt for everyone

Many supports (visual schedules, choices, breaks) help the whole group, so use them for everyone. That way, no one is singled out.

Friends, not helpers

Buddies and peers are friends. Coach them to play *with*, wait, and include, not to take over.

BEFORE THE SESSION

- ☐ Send the **All About Me** page to families a week ahead, or chat at drop-off.
- ☐ Print the visual schedule, First-Then board, and communication cards.
- ☐ Set up a calm corner (beanbag or rug, fidgets, headphones, a few books).
- ☐ Prep craft pieces at all three levels (see the Adapted craft page).
- ☐ Brief your buddies (see “Being a great buddy” below).

BEING A GREAT BUDDY

- Talk **to** your buddy, not about them. Use age-appropriate words, not baby talk.
- Ask before helping: “Want a hand with that?”
- Give time to answer. Don’t finish their sentences.
- Find shared interests: music, games, sports, shows.
- Include them in the group’s jokes and conversation.
- If they’re overwhelmed, offer a break or a walk. Don’t make a scene.

A WORD ABOUT WORDS

Many people in the Down syndrome community prefer person-first language (“a child with Down syndrome”). Many autistic people prefer identity-first language (“an autistic child”). There’s no single right answer. **Ask the family, and the person, and use what they use.**

This Adapted Edition goes with the Ages 13+ guide, “A Seat at the Table.” Use them together. These are practical ministry tips, not medical or therapy advice. Families and their care teams know what works best for their child.

QUICK GUIDE

Six kinds of support

Most children need a mix. Start with what the family tells you, watch what helps, and adjust. Every child is different, including children who share a diagnosis.



Communication

Children who speak few words, use sign, pictures, or an AAC device, or need extra time to answer.

- Offer choices with pictures instead of open questions.
- Accept every kind of answer: pointing, signing, a device, a thumbs-up, or a smile.
- Program key words (God, love, me, friend) into AAC devices ahead of time. Ask the family.
- Wait 5-10 seconds for a response. Don't answer for them.



Sensory

Children who find noise, lights, touch, crowds, or smells overwhelming, or who seek extra movement and input.

- Offer noise-reducing headphones and a quieter seat near the edge.
- Give a heads-up before loud moments like music or cheering.
- Have a calm corner with soft items and fidgets.
- Offer alternatives to messy materials (stickers instead of glue, crayons instead of paint).



Motor

Children with low muscle tone, limited fine-motor control, or who use a wheelchair, walker, or other mobility equipment.

- Use chunky crayons, adaptive (loop) scissors, glue sticks, or glue dots.
- Pre-cut pieces or enlarge templates to 150%.
- Offer hand-under-hand help (your hand under theirs), and only when they want it.
- Plan every game so it can be played seated or rolling.



Attention & regulation

Children who need movement, get overwhelmed, struggle with transitions, or need breaks to stay calm and engaged.

- Show a visual schedule and point to it at every change.
- Give warnings: "2 more minutes, then craft." Use a timer they can see.
- Use First-Then: "First story, then game."
- Make breaks a normal part of the room, not a punishment.



Learning & processing

Children who learn at a different pace, need repetition, or understand more with concrete, hands-on examples.

- Use short sentences and one-step directions.
- Show, then tell. Model everything first.
- Repeat the one big idea often, in the same words.
- Use real objects and pictures alongside every story.



Vision & hearing

Children who are blind or have low vision, or who are Deaf or hard of hearing.

- Use large print, bold lines, and high contrast. Add tactile lines with puffy paint or wax sticks.
- Describe pictures and actions out loud.
- Face the child when you talk, and use visuals, signs, and captions.
- Seat them where they can see or hear best, and ask them where that is.

Down syndrome, autism, and more. Children with Down syndrome often benefit from visuals, hands-on learning, extra processing time, and motor supports. Autistic children often benefit from predictability, sensory supports, clear expectations, and respect for how they communicate. Some children are both. The supports in this guide work across all of these, so pick what fits the child in front of you.

FOR FAMILIES · PLEASE RETURN TO YOUR CHILD'S LEADER

All About Me

Help us welcome your child well. Share as much or as little as you like.

Photo or drawing
of me

My name is... / I like to be called...

I'm great at...

I love... (favorite things, shows, songs, toys)

How I communicate (words, signs, pictures, device, gestures)

Things that are hard for me (noises, textures, crowds, changes)

When I'm upset, it may look like...

Things that help me feel calm

Help I might need (bathroom, eating, moving, safety)

Words or language our family uses

Allergies, medical, or safety notes

Would a buddy help? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Let's try it OK to take photos of my child? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Feet/hands only
Parent/guardian: _____ Phone during service: _____

Kept private and shared only with your child's leaders.

PLAN IT

Session adaptation map

Every part of the session, with ready-made adaptations. Scan the column for the support the child needs.

PART	COMMUNICATION	SENSORY	MOTOR	ATTENTION & REGULATION	LEARNING
Welcome	Greet like every teen. Talk board available.	Seat by the door. Headphones OK. Lights not too bright.	Accessible seating inside the circle.	Agenda posted for everyone.	Pair with a peer from the start.
Lesson	Plain-language summary. Response cards.	No surprise loud media.	Seated reading parts.	Chunk: read, pause, talk.	Plain summary before the discussion.
Verse	Chunked verse + signs.	Quiet repetition.	Type it on a phone.	Paraphrase in pairs.	Focus on the first half.
Craft	Ready-made invitations to choose from.	Low-mess.	Pre-cut cards. Thick pens.	Short and clear.	Model one example.
Project	Teen with lived experience co-leads.	Avoid loud or crowded areas, or plan breaks.	Accessible route. Seated roles.	Clear route and time limit.	Picture checklist option.
Prayer & go	Silent or written prayer option.	Leave a few minutes early if needed.	Hands folded or open.	Clear end signal.	Same closing each week.

VISION & HEARING, EVERY PART

Large print (enlarge pages to 150%), high-contrast bold lines, and describing pictures out loud. For children who are Deaf or hard of hearing: face them, use the verse signs and visuals, turn on captions for any video, and seat them where they can see your face and hands.

KEEP IT CALM & SAFE

When a child is overwhelmed

Big feelings are normal, and they usually mean a child needs something, like less noise, a break, or more time. Your calm is the most important support in the room.

WHEN A CHILD IS OVERWHELMED

- 1 Notice**
Watch for early signs: covering ears, pacing, going quiet, or getting louder.
- 2 Reduce**
Lower your voice, use fewer words, dim the noise. Move the group, not the child, if you can.
- 3 Offer**
Show the break card or calm-down choices. Let them choose.
- 4 Wait**
Give space and time. Don't ask questions or explain yet.
- 5 Reconnect**
Welcome them back warmly, with no lecture. Returning is always the goal.

CALM CORNER CHECKLIST

- ☐ Beanbag, rug, or small pop-up tent
- ☐ Noise-reducing headphones (kid and adult sizes)
- ☐ Fidgets, squeeze balls, a weighted lap pad (if the family uses one)
- ☐ Picture books and the calm-down choices card
- ☐ Visible from the room, so a leader can always see the child

SAFETY & DIGNITY

- Never restrain or force a child to participate.
- Keep bathroom help private, and follow your church's two-adult policy.
- Know each child's allergies and medical plans.
- Share information about a child only with leaders who need it.

SET UP A SENSORY-FRIENDLY ROOM

- Turn off or dim buzzing lights. Use lamps or natural light if you can.
- Keep music and mic volume low, and warn before it starts.
- Clear clutter and keep walls calm, so there's less to take in.
- Use the same room setup every week.
- Mark a quiet exit path to the calm corner.

TALKING WITH FAMILIES AFTERWARD

- Start with something good: "She loved the craft!"
- Share what happened simply and privately, without blame.
- Say what helped, and ask what they'd suggest.
- Thank them. They trusted you with their child.
- Invite them back: "We can't wait to see him next week."

Behavior is communication. Rocking, flapping, humming, pacing, or chewing often help a child stay calm and focused, so there's no need to stop them. Step in only if someone could get hurt. Then tell the family what happened and what helped, kindly and privately.

ADAPTED LESSON

A Seat at the King's Table

A plain-language version of 2 Samuel 9 for teens who benefit from simpler text. It's the same story and the same dignity, with fewer words. Read it before the full passage.

PLAIN-LANGUAGE STORY (READ SLOWLY, POINT TO EACH PICTURE)

1  King David asked: who can I be kind to?	2  He found Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son.	3  Mephibosheth was afraid. He felt unimportant.	4  David said: you will always eat at my table.	5  He was treated like family, for good.
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MAKE IT HANDS-ON

- Set a real table with one extra chair and a name card. Ask: "Who is this seat for?"
- Give each teen a printed copy of the plain-language story and the full passage.
- Use the discussion response cards (last pages) so everyone can answer.

IF... THEN TRY...

- If discussion is too fast or abstract, go back to the table and the empty chair. Keep it concrete.
- If a teen with a disability is in the group, don't cast them as Mephibosheth. The lesson is about all of us being welcomed by God.
- If a teen prefers to write or type, collect answers on sticky notes and read them anonymously.

ASK IT WITH CHOICES

- "Was David's gift charity or family?"
- "How did Mephibosheth feel at first: afraid or excited?"
- "Who needs a seat at our table: a new student, someone who sits alone, or someone with a disability?" (All could!)

TEACHING MOVES THAT HELP EVERY LEARNER

- One big idea, said the same way every time
- Show, then tell: hold up the picture or object first
- Pause after each sentence and count to 5
- Praise effort: "You pointed to the right picture!"

ADAPTED PRAYER

God, thank You for welcoming me. Help me make room for others. Amen.

Children can pray by repeating, pointing to the pray card, signing, holding hands, or simply being present.

ADAPTED MEMORY VERSE

See it, sign it, say it

Teens can learn the verse in chunks with visuals and signs. Paraphrasing it counts just as much as memorizing.

LEARN IT IN CHUNKS



Accept one another,



just as Christ



accepted you,



to bring glory to God.

FULL VERSE: “ACCEPT ONE ANOTHER, THEN, JUST AS CHRIST ACCEPTED YOU, IN ORDER TO BRING GLORY TO GOD.” ROMANS 15:7

KEY-WORD SIGNS (ASL)

Accept

Open hands in front pull toward your chest, closing

Jesus

Middle finger of one hand touches the palm of the other, then switch

You

Point to the other person

God

Flat hand, fingers pointing up, starts above your head and moves down in front of your face

Welcome

Open hand sweeps in toward your body

Friend

Hook index fingers together, then flip and hook again

Check a video dictionary (like Signing Savvy or HandSpeak) to see each sign. If the child already uses a sign system, follow the family.

EVERY WAY COUNTS

- Saying or reading it
- Paraphrasing: “Welcome people like Jesus welcomes you.”
- Signing key words
- Typing it or using a device

PRACTICE IDEAS

- Set it as a phone lock screen.
- Pair paraphrase: each pair writes their own version.
- Name one place to live it this week.

ADAPTED CRAFT

There's a Seat for You, adapted

Use the ready-made invitation cards (next page) so every teen can invite someone, whether or not they write.

Level 1 • Full support

- Choose a ready-made invitation by pointing, and glue it inside a pre-cut card.
- Buddy helps write the name of who it's for (optional).

Level 2 • Some support

- Choose an invitation and add a name and a drawing.
- Fold and decorate.

Level 3 • Standard or stretch

- Write a personal invitation.
- Stretch: make a card for someone outside the youth group and deliver it this week.

ADAPTIVE SUPPLIES

- ☐ Pre-cut place cards (enlarged if needed)
- ☐ Ready-made invitation cards (next page)
- ☐ Glue sticks or tape
- ☐ Thick and fine pens
- ☐ Stickers (age-appropriate)

SENSORY-FRIENDLY SWAPS

- Low-mess, quiet table option.
- Keep it short. Done early is fine.
- Let teens work with a chosen peer.

SHOW THE STEPS



Cut these out from the visual schedule page, or point to them here.

The process matters more than the product. A craft that's mostly stickers, or one that's finished with lots of help, still counts. So does a child who chooses to watch. Praise their choices ("You picked blue!"), not how neat it looks.

CRAFT PRINTABLE

Ready-made invitations

Cut apart. Teens choose one to glue inside their place card.



Want to sit together?



I'm glad you're here.



Come to youth group with me!



There's a seat for you.



Want to hang out this week?



You belong here.

ADAPTED ACTIVITY

Church Welcome Walk (adapted)

The service project, set up so teens with disabilities lead it as experts, and so the walk itself is accessible and not overwhelming.

SET IT UP FOR SUCCESS

- ☐ Invite a teen or adult with a disability to co-lead, if they'd like to. Their perspective is the heart of this project.
- ☐ Plan an accessible route and a quiet stop.
- ☐ Offer the picture checklist (after the invitation cards).
- ☐ Set a clear time limit and a meeting point.

WAYS TO PLAY

- **Photographer:** photos of spaces only.
- **Checker:** marks yes/some/no with the picture checklist.
- **Reporter:** shares findings, speaking, typing, or pointing.
- **Tester:** tries the route (door, ramp, seating) and reports how it felt.

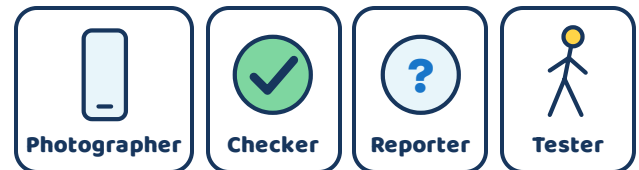
WAITING & TURN-TAKING SUPPORTS

- Show whose turn it is: pass a sock or a "my turn" card.
- Use the wait card with a visual timer.
- Keep groups small so turns come quickly.
- Give waiting kids a job: counting, cheering, or holding something.

IF... THEN TRY...

- **If an area is loud or crowded,** skip it, or visit when it's empty.
- **If a teen gets tired,** give them the reporter role at a seated station.
- **If a teen shares a barrier they face,** thank them and make sure it goes in the recommendations.

JOBS ANYONE CAN CHOOSE



CELEBRATE PARTICIPATION

- Praise trying, not winning.
- Every way of joining counts: watching, cheering, and choosing all count.
- End with a group cheer so everyone finishes together.
- Tell families one specific thing their child did well.

ACTIVITY PRINTABLE

Picture Welcome Walk checklist

A picture version of the checklist. Circle yes, some, or no for each one.



Is the entrance easy to get into?

YES

SOME

NO



Can everyone sit with the group?

YES

SOME

NO



Is there a quiet place?

YES

SOME

NO



Are words big and clear?

YES

SOME

NO



Does someone say hi?

YES

SOME

NO



Do people with disabilities have jobs here?

YES

SOME

NO

PRINTABLE · VISUAL SUPPORTS

Today's schedule & First-Then board

Post the schedule where everyone can see it. Point to each step as you go, and turn it over or move it to “done” when it’s finished. Cut out cards to use on the First-Then board.



1



Welcome

2



Read

3



Discuss

4



Verse

5



Invite cards

6



Welcome Walk

7



Pray & go

FIRST

THEN

place a card here

place a card here

HOW TO USE FIRST-THEN

- Put the less-preferred activity in FIRST and a favorite in THEN.
- Say it simply: “First story, then game.”
- Point, wait, and follow through every time.
- Velcro dots on the back make cards easy to move.

TRANSITION TIPS

- Give a 2-minute warning with a visual timer.
- Hand the child the next card to carry to the next spot.
- Sing the same short clean-up or move song each time.

PRINTABLE · VISUAL SUPPORTS

Talk board, break cards & calm-down choices

Keep the talk board on the table or clipboard. Model it: point to the words as *you* talk. Laminate if you can.



 Yes	 No	 More	 All done
 Help	 Break	 Bathroom	 Drink
 Happy	 Sad	 Mad	 Worried
 God	 Love	 Friend	 Thinking

 I need a break Hand this card to a leader	 I need help Hand this card to a leader
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CALM-DOWN CHOICES

Smell the flower, blow out the candle	Squeeze a ball	Headphones on
Take a walk with a buddy	Use a fidget	Quiet corner

SHARE BEFORE YOUTH GROUP

What to Expect Tonight

For teens who like to know the plan. Send it to families ahead of time, or give it at the door.



We start with snacks and a quick icebreaker.



We read 2 Samuel 9, about a king who gave someone a seat at his table.



We talk in a circle. I can speak, write, point to a card, or just listen.



We make place cards to invite someone.



We walk around the church and look for ways to make it more welcoming.



I can take a break any time. I show my card or tell a leader.



We pray and I get a 5-day devotional.

ADAPTED TAKE-HOME

Picture verse cards & family note








Accept one another, just as Christ accepted you, to bring glory to God.

ROMANS 15:7






Accept one another, just as Christ accepted you, to bring glory to God.

ROMANS 15:7






Accept one another, just as Christ accepted you, to bring glory to God.

ROMANS 15:7






Accept one another, just as Christ accepted you, to bring glory to God.

ROMANS 15:7

FOR FAMILIES

Your teen studied: a seat at the table

Tonight we studied 2 Samuel 9, where King David welcomed Mephibosheth as family, and Romans 15:7: “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you.” We used a plain-language version, visual supports, and hands-on activities. Try the devotional from the main guide together, using the picture cards as needed.

PRACTICE AT HOME

- Practice the first chunk of Romans 15:7 with the pictures.
- Try the signs for **accept**, **Jesus**, and **you**.
- Invite someone to a family meal this month.

SIGNS TO TRY

Accept

Open hands in front pull toward your chest, closing

Jesus

Middle finger of one hand touches the palm of the other, then switch

You

Point to the other person

TELL US HOW IT WENT

What helped your child today? What should we try next time? Anything we should know?

Wear fun, mismatched socks on 3.21 and share a feet photo with [#Celebrate321](https://www.instagram.com/Celebrate321). More free resources at [Celebrate321.org](https://www.Celebrate321.org).

PRINTABLE

Discussion response cards

Cut apart and give each teen a set. Hold one up to respond. It's a great tool for everyone, not just teens with disabilities.



I agree



I disagree



I'm thinking



I have a question



**That matters to
me**



Come back to me



Tell me more



I'm done sharing

FOR PRETEEN AND TEEN HELPERS

Peer buddy guide

Being a buddy isn't babysitting. It's friendship. Here's how to be a great one.

DO

- Say hi by name and sit together.
- Talk about normal stuff: games, music, shows, sports.
- Ask before you help: "Want a hand?"
- Wait for answers. Count to 10 in your head.
- Include them in jokes and group conversation.
- Use their communication: point to the talk board, learn a sign, and wait for their device.
- Tell a leader if they seem upset or need a break.

DON'T

- Talk about them like they're not there.
- Use baby talk or a sing-song voice.
- Do everything for them.
- Force them to join in or make eye contact.
- Make a big deal about breaks or stims (rocking, flapping, humming). Those help people regulate.
- Take photos or videos of them without asking.

IF YOUR BUDDY GETS UPSET

- Stay calm and use fewer words.
- Offer the break card or a walk.
- Give space. Don't crowd them.
- Get a leader. You don't have to handle it alone.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

- "What's your favorite show / game / song right now?"
- "Do you have any pets?"
- "What did you do this weekend?"
- "Want to be on my team?"
- If they use a device or pictures, ask yes/no or choice questions, and wait.

INCLUDE THEM IN THE GROUP

- Save them a seat, and sit next to them, not across.
- Repeat or point to what the group is talking about.
- Invite them to share: "What do you think?" Then wait.
- Give them a real job: reader, timer, team captain.
- Stick together at transitions and hallway times.

"Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Outdo yourselves in honoring one another." Romans 12:10