

Sensory Room & Sensory-Friendly Service Guide

Start with a corner and a bin



Some people experience church as too loud, too bright, too crowded, or too long. A sensory room gives anyone a calm place to reset, and a sensory-friendly service lets whole families worship together without worry. This guide covers both, with supply lists for any budget and printables you can use this Sunday.

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SENSORY ROOM

A calm place for anyone

A sensory room isn't a playroom or a place to send kids away. It's a short stop to reset, so a person can rejoin their class or the service. It helps kids *and* adults with autism, Down syndrome, ADHD, anxiety, and sensory differences, and parents of babies, too.

5 ZONES



Calm & cozy

A beanbag or floor cushions, a soft blanket, and a small tent or canopy to crawl into. Dim, warm light.



Movement

A small trampoline with a handle, a wobble cushion, a rocking chair, or a mini tunnel. Movement helps many bodies settle.



Touch

Fidgets, stress balls, textured cards, kinetic sand in a lidded bin, and a weighted lap pad.



Look & listen

Bubble tube or lava lamp, a light projector, calm music, and noise-reducing headphones.



Stay connected

Picture Bibles, board books, and a speaker or screen with the service audio or livestream turned low.

CHOOSING THE SPACE

- Close to the kids' area and the worship space
- A door with a window (for safety and visibility)
- Away from the loudest hallway if you can
- Can be a whole room, half a room, or a corner with a divider
- Outlets for lamps and a speaker

HOW IT RUNS

- **Two adults** when children are using it, following your child-protection policy
- Kids come with their teacher, buddy, or parent
- Use a timer: 5-10 minutes, then check in
- Sign in on the use log
- Wipe and reset toys after each Sunday

NAME IT WELL

Try "The Calm Room," "The Reset Room," or "The Quiet Place." Tell everyone it's for **anyone** who needs a break, so no one feels singled out.

SIGNS SOMEONE NEEDS A BREAK

- Covering ears or eyes
- Pacing, rocking, or hiding
- Getting louder, or very quiet
- Tears, frustration, or running off

WHAT TO SAY

"Want a break? Let's go to the calm room for 5 minutes. Then we'll go back to our group."

COMING BACK

- Show the schedule: "First break, then snack"
- Walk back together
- Welcome them back warmly, without fuss

STOCK IT

Supply lists for any budget

Start small. A corner with a bin of the right things does more than an expensive room nobody uses. Ask your church family to donate from a wish list.

Starter

ABOUT \$100-150

- ☐ Floor cushions or a beanbag
- ☐ A soft blanket
- ☐ A basket of fidgets and stress balls
- ☐ 2-4 pairs of noise-reducing headphones
- ☐ A battery lamp or string lights
- ☐ Picture cards and a visual timer
- ☐ Board books and a picture Bible
- ☐ Hand wipes and a bin with a lid

Growing

ABOUT \$300-600

- ☐ Everything in Starter, plus:
- ☐ Small pop-up tent or canopy
- ☐ Wobble cushion and rocking chair
- ☐ Weighted lap pad (no weighted blankets for kids without family OK)
- ☐ Bubble tube or lava lamp
- ☐ Kinetic sand in a lidded bin
- ☐ Speaker with calm music / service audio
- ☐ Rug and a room divider

Full room

ABOUT \$1,000+

- ☐ Everything in Growing, plus:
- ☐ Mini trampoline with a handle
- ☐ Crash pad or large floor mat
- ☐ Light projector (no strobes or flashing)
- ☐ Mounted screen for the livestream
- ☐ Soft seating for adults and parents
- ☐ Dimmable lights or window film
- ☐ Wall padding in the movement zone

SAFETY FIRST

- No small parts in rooms for young children
- Check toys for loose pieces every month
- Secure tall furniture and cords
- Nothing with strobe or fast-flashing lights
- Weighted items only with family permission
- Keep food and drinks out

WISH LIST IDEAS

Post a sign-up or online wish list around Rock Your Socks Sunday. People love giving something they can picture. Include a note: "Help us make a calm place for everyone."

ASK THE EXPERTS

Families, occupational therapists, and special education teachers in your church can help choose what fits your people. Ask them to walk through the space with you.

Price ranges are rough estimates and will vary with what you already have, donations, and where you shop.

Calm Room

In the calm room, we...



Walk



Quiet voice



Take turns



Gentle hands



Clean up



Ask for help

Everyone is welcome here. Take a break, then go back when you're ready.

KEEP IT RUNNING

Use & cleaning log

A simple log keeps the room safe and shows you how it's being used. Use first names or initials only.

USE LOG • DATE: _____

[illegible]

AFTER EVERY SUNDAY

- ☐ Wipe fidgets, headphones, and hard toys
- ☐ Put toys back in labeled bins
- ☐ Check for broken or loose pieces
- ☐ Shake out cushions and blankets
- ☐ Lights off, speaker off, door closed
- ☐ Restock wipes and tissues

ONCE A MONTH

- ☐ Wash blankets and soft covers
- ☐ Deep clean mats and the tent
- ☐ Replace worn fidgets and sand
- ☐ Check batteries and bulbs
- ☐ Review the log: what's used most? What's missing?
- ☐ Thank your room volunteers

SENSORY-FRIENDLY SERVICE

Worship without worry

A sensory-friendly service is a real worship service, with a few changes so everyone can come as they are. Try one on or near Rock Your Socks Sunday, then once a month or once a quarter.

SPACE

- ☐ Lights a little lower, with no strobes, haze, or fog
- ☐ Volume lower than usual; offer headphones at the door
- ☐ Seating choices: chairs, floor cushions, rockers, space at the back
- ☐ A clear path to the exits and restrooms
- ☐ The calm room open and staffed

SERVICE

- ☐ Shorter: 30–45 minutes
- ☐ A visual schedule on screen and on paper
- ☐ Familiar songs, repeated; lyrics with pictures
- ☐ Short message with a picture or object
- ☐ Movement is welcome, and so are sounds

PEOPLE

- ☐ Greeters trained with the Volunteer Inclusion Training
- ☐ Ushers with sensory bags
- ☐ Families of people with disabilities helped plan it
- ☐ People with disabilities serving up front
- ☐ A snack or fellowship time with a quiet option

ANNOUNCEMENT / INVITATION

“You’re invited to our **Sensory-Friendly Worship Service** on [date] at [time]. It’s a relaxed, shorter service with softer lights and sound, seating choices, and a calm room. Move, make noise, take breaks, come as you are. Everyone is welcome, especially people with autism, Down syndrome, sensory differences, and their families. Questions? Contact [name]. We can’t wait to worship with you!”

SEND FAMILIES AHEAD OF TIME

- The visual service schedule (next page)
- Photos of the entrance, room, restrooms, and calm room
- A fill-in social story (in the Greeter & Welcome Pack)
- Who will greet them, and where to park

A WORD TO YOUR REGULAR CONGREGATION

“If you hear a sound or see someone moving during worship, that’s someone worshipping in their own way. Smile, and make room. That’s what a church family does.”

SAMPLE ORDER (ABOUT 40 MINUTES)



Welcome
5 min



2 songs
8 min



Prayer
3 min



Bible story
10 min



1 song + prayer
7 min



Snack & hello
7 min

Our worship schedule

Check each box when it's done. Change the order to match your service.



1



Say hello

☐

2



Sing

☐

3



Pray

☐

4



Bible story

☐

5



Listen

☐

6



Sing

☐

7



Pray

☐

8



All done!

☐

FOR USHERS & GREETERS

Sensory bags

Keep 4-10 bags at the welcome desk and with ushers. Offer them freely to anyone, kids or adults. Never make someone explain why they want one.

WHAT GOES IN EACH BAG

- ☐ Noise-reducing headphones (kid and adult sizes)
- ☐ 2-3 fidgets
- ☐ A visual service schedule
- ☐ Break and help picture cards
- ☐ Sunglasses or a brimmed cap (for bright lights)
- ☐ A small notepad and crayons
- ☐ Wipes
- ☐ A card: "Please return to an usher. Thank you!"

HOW TO OFFER

"We have headphones and a few fidgets if anyone would like them. Just return the bag to me after the service."

Offer to the whole family, not only one person.

AFTER THE SERVICE

- Wipe headphones and fidgets
- Restock missing items
- Count bags and note what was used

BAG TAGS · CUT OUT AND ATTACH



Sensory Bag

Headphones, fidgets, and a picture schedule for anyone who'd like them. Use during the service, then return to an usher.

Everyone is welcome here!



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