

Volunteer Inclusion Training

No experience needed to lead it



A ready-to-lead 30-minute training for kids' ministry, youth, greeters, and anyone who serves. It gives every volunteer the basics: why inclusion matters, a few simple facts, words that work, five everyday supports, what to do when someone is overwhelmed, and how to keep everyone safe and respected.

WHAT'S INSIDE

- 1 30-minute facilitator agenda
- 2 Leader script (5 parts)
- 3 Words that work
- 4 5 everyday supports
- 5 When a child is overwhelmed
- 6 6 practice scenarios + answers
- 7 Participant handout & quiz
- 8 Commitment cards & certificate

FOR THE LEADER

30-minute agenda

Run this before a new ministry season, before Rock Your Socks Sunday, or anytime you add new volunteers. It works in person or on a video call.

TIME	SECTION	LENGTH
0:00	Welcome & why it matters Open with the sock question. Share the big idea: everyone belongs, and small changes make a big difference.	5 min
0:05	A few simple facts Down syndrome, autism, and other disabilities. Start with the person, not the label.	5 min
0:10	Words that work + 5 everyday supports Walk through the handout. Model the supports with picture cards and a visual schedule.	7 min
0:17	When a child is overwhelmed + safety & dignity Practice the calm steps. Review your church's safety policies.	5 min
0:22	Practice scenarios Pairs or tables each take a scenario, then share. Use the answers as a guide, not a script.	6 min
0:28	Commit & pray Everyone fills in a commitment card. Close in prayer.	2 min

BEFORE THE TRAINING

- ☐ Print a participant handout and a commitment card for each person
- ☐ Print 1 practice scenario per table (or pair)
- ☐ Print a set of picture cards and a visual schedule from the Adapted Kids Ministry Guides
- ☐ Have your church's child-protection policy handy
- ☐ Bring a fidget, headphones, and a timer to pass around
- ☐ Invite a parent or adult with a disability to share for 2 minutes (optional, and only if they'd like to)

TIPS FOR LEADING

- You don't need to be an expert. You're helping people be kind, calm, and prepared.
- Keep it light. Mistakes are part of learning.
- Never use a real child in your church as an example.
- Point people to the family as the real expert on their child.

AFTER THE TRAINING

Send the handout by email, add names to your trained-volunteer list, and plan a 10-minute refresher each season. Hand out certificates at your next volunteer gathering.

LEADER SCRIPT

Part 1 & 2: Why it matters, and a few facts

Read it as written or say it in your own words. Text in brackets is for you to fill in.

PART 1 · WHY IT MATTERS · 5 MINUTES

“Quick question: what kind of socks are you wearing today? [Let a few people answer.] Every pair is different. That’s a picture of our church. God made every person on purpose, and the Bible says the body of Christ needs every part (1 Corinthians 12).

About 1 in 6 children in the U.S. has a developmental disability. Many families with a child with a disability have stopped going to church, or never started, because they weren’t sure their child would be welcome.

We want to be the church where they are.

Here’s the good news: inclusion isn’t mostly about special programs. It’s about ordinary volunteers doing a few small things well. That’s what today is about.”

PART 2 · A FEW SIMPLE FACTS · 5 MINUTES

“**Start with the person, not the label.** Every child is different. The best expert on a child is their family, so ask them.

Down syndrome happens when a person has an extra copy of chromosome 21. About 5,700 babies with Down syndrome are born in the U.S. each year. Many kids with Down syndrome learn best by seeing and doing, may need more time to answer, and may be understood better with pictures and signs. Their understanding is often stronger than their speech.

Autism affects how a person communicates, connects, and experiences the world. Some autistic kids talk a lot, and some don’t use spoken words. Many are sensitive to noise, lights, or touch, and many love routines and knowing what’s next.

Other disabilities include ADHD, cerebral palsy, hearing or vision loss, anxiety, and many more. You don’t need to know the diagnosis to help. You need to watch, ask, and adjust.”

IF SOMEONE ASKS SOMETHING YOU DON’T KNOW

“Great question. I don’t know, but the family would be the best people to ask, or I can find out.”

AVOID

Guessing a child’s diagnosis, talking about a child in front of them, and “always” statements (like “kids with Down syndrome are always happy”). Every person has the full range of feelings.

LEADER SCRIPT · PART 3 · 7 MINUTES

Words that work & 5 everyday supports

Words shape how kids see each other. Supports help every child, not just children with disabilities.

SAY THIS	INSTEAD OF THIS
a person with Down syndrome	a Down's kid, a Down syndrome child
has a disability / has autism (or "autistic," if the person prefers)	suffers from, is afflicted with, is a victim of
uses a wheelchair	is wheelchair-bound, is confined to a wheelchair
typically developing	normal, healthy (as the opposite of disabled)
communicates with a device, signs, or pictures	is nonverbal so they don't understand
accessible bathroom or parking	handicapped bathroom or parking
Let's take a break.	Calm down! Stop that!
the r-word: never	The r-word is hurtful. Gently stop it if you hear it.

A NOTE ON PREFERENCES

Many people with Down syndrome and their families prefer person-first language ("person with"). Many autistic adults prefer identity-first language ("autistic person"). **When in doubt, ask the person or family which they prefer, and use it.**

SAY

"None of these supports cost money, and all of them help every kid in the room. If you only remember one thing today: **show what's next, and give wait time.**"

5 EVERYDAY SUPPORTS



Show what's next

Use a visual schedule and a "first / then" card. Give a 2-minute warning before every change.



Give wait time

Ask, then count to 10 in your head. Many kids need extra time to answer.



Show, don't just tell

Model it, point, use pictures and simple signs. Keep words short: "Sit, please."



Lower the sensory load

Offer headphones, a fidget, a quieter seat, or a walk. Dim bright lights if you can.



Offer choices

"Red or blue?" "Sit or stand?" Choices build independence and cut down on power struggles.

LEADER SCRIPT · PART 4 · 5 MINUTES

When a child is overwhelmed

A meltdown is not a tantrum and not bad behavior. It's a child whose body is overloaded. Our job is to help them feel safe again.

THE 6 CALM STEPS

- 1 Stay calm and close**
Lower your voice and your body. Your calm is contagious.
- 2 Use fewer words**
Short and kind: "You're safe. Let's take a break."
- 3 Lower the input**
Move away from noise and crowds. Offer headphones or the calm corner.
- 4 Offer a calm tool**
Breathe together, squeeze a fidget, get a drink of water, or take a walk with a second adult.
- 5 Wait it out**
Don't ask questions, lecture, or threaten. Let the body settle first.
- 6 Reconnect, then return**
Praise the calm. Show the schedule: "First break, then craft." Tell the parent kindly at pickup.

SIGNS A CHILD MAY BE GETTING OVERWHELMED

- Covering ears or eyes, hiding, or running off
- Rocking, pacing, or flapping more than usual
- Getting louder, quieter, or very still
- Crying, hitting, or throwing



Breathe



Squeeze



Headphones



Walk

STIMMING IS OK

Flapping, rocking, humming, or spinning often helps a child stay calm and focused. If it's safe, let it be. Don't ask a child to stop just because it looks different.

SAFETY & DIGNITY: FOLLOW YOUR CHURCH'S POLICY ON EVERY POINT

- **Two adults, always.** Never be alone with a child, including during breaks and walks.
- **Bathroom help:** only trained, approved volunteers, with the door ajar and the family's plan followed.
- **Touch:** ask first. Use hand-under-hand to guide, never hand-over-hand or holding a child down.
- **Runners:** know the exits. One adult follows calmly, one alerts the leader.
- **Medical & allergies:** read the child's About Me page. Never give medicine or food without the family's OK.
- **Privacy:** don't share a child's diagnosis or story with anyone who doesn't need it.
- **Photos:** only with written permission from the family.
- **Report:** tell your leader and the family about any incident the same day.

LEADER SCRIPT • PART 5 • 6 MINUTES

Practice scenarios (1 of 2)

Give each table or pair one scenario. Ask: What's going on for this child? What would you do first? What could we change next week? Then share the ideas below.

1 The snack table

Maya, who has Down syndrome, won't leave the snack table when it's time for the lesson. She sits down on the floor.

TRY THIS

Get on her level. Give a clear first/then: "First story, then more snack later." Point to the schedule. Give wait time. Offer a choice: "Walk with me or hold my hand?" Next week, give a 2-minute warning before snack ends.

2 Loud worship

When the music gets loud, Eli, who is autistic, covers his ears and crawls under a table.

TRY THIS

He's protecting himself, and that's OK. Don't pull him out. Offer headphones or ask if he'd like to go to a quieter spot with a second adult. Next time, give him a seat at the back or the headphones before music starts.

3 A question out loud

A child asks loudly, "Why does Sam talk funny?" Sam is right there.

TRY THIS

Keep it calm and positive, and talk to Sam, not about him: "Sam talks in his own way, and he has great things to say. Sam, want to tell us about your dog?" Later, privately: "Everyone's voice is different. Let's be patient listeners."

HOW TO RUN THE SCENARIOS

- Groups of 2-4, one scenario each
- 2 minutes to talk, then 30 seconds each to share
- Read the answer ideas only after groups share
- Ask: "Would this help other kids too?" (Almost always, yes!)

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- What might this child be feeling?
- What could we set up *before* this happens next week?
- What would we tell the family, and how?

PRACTICE SCENARIOS

Practice scenarios (2 of 2)

These are guides, not scripts. There is almost always more than one good answer, and the family is the best source of what works.

4 A rushed drop-off

A dad drops off his son and says, "He's had a rough morning," then hurries away.

TRY THIS

Say, "Thanks for telling me. We've got him." Ask one quick question: "Anything that helps today?" Keep things low-key, offer the calm corner early, and give the dad a kind, honest update at pickup. Make sure your leader knows how to reach him.

5 The tablet

A new volunteer tells Ava to put away her tablet because "it's not game time." The tablet is Ava's communication device.

TRY THIS

A communication device is a child's voice. Never take it away. Kindly tell the volunteer, then apologize to Ava. Give Ava time to answer with it, and ask the family to add a few church words to it, like "pray," "sing," and "Jesus."

6 A runner

During craft time, Jonah suddenly runs out of the room and down the hallway.

TRY THIS

Stay calm and don't chase at a sprint (it can feel like a game). One adult follows at a walking pace, keeping him in sight. Another tells the leader. Gently guide him back or to a calm spot. Tell the family, and plan together, e.g. a seat away from the door and a "walk break" card.

THE PATTERN IN EVERY ANSWER

- Stay calm, and see the child, not the behavior
- Use fewer words, visuals, and choices
- Keep everyone safe with two adults
- Partner with the family and plan for next week

CLOSE IN PRAYER

"God, thank You for every child You bring through our doors. Give us patience, creativity, and love. Help every person here know they belong. Amen."

PARTICIPANT HANDOUT

Everyone belongs here

Keep this in your ministry bag or on your phone.

REMEMBER

- Start with the person, not the label
- The family is the expert. Ask them.
- Every child can learn about God's love
- Small changes make a big difference

WORDS THAT WORK

- "Person with Down syndrome" (or ask what they prefer)
- "Uses a wheelchair," not "wheelchair-bound"
- "Has a disability," not "suffers from"
- Never the r-word

5 EVERYDAY SUPPORTS

- **Show what's next:** schedule + first/then
- **Give wait time:** count to 10
- **Show, don't just tell:** model, pictures, signs
- **Lower the sensory load:** headphones, fidgets, quiet seat
- **Offer choices:** "This or that?"

WHEN A CHILD IS OVERWHELMED

- Stay calm and close
- Use fewer words
- Lower the noise and crowd
- Offer a calm tool
- Wait it out, then reconnect

SAFETY & DIGNITY

- Two adults, always
- Ask before touch; hand-under-hand only
- Never take away a communication device
- Follow each child's About Me page
- Photos only with permission

GOOD QUESTIONS TO ASK A FAMILY

- What does your child love?
- What helps on a hard day?
- How does your child tell us yes, no, or "I need a break"?
- Is there anything we should avoid?
- What would make Sunday a win for your family?

BEFORE EVERY SUNDAY

- ☐ Read the About Me pages for your group
- ☐ Set out the visual schedule
- ☐ Check the calm corner is stocked
- ☐ Know who your second adult is

MY CONTACTS

Ministry leader: _____

Inclusion / buddy coordinator: _____

Calm corner is at: _____

"Now you are the body of Christ, and each of you is a member of it."

1 Corinthians 12:27 (BSB)

CHECK WHAT YOU LEARNED

10-question quiz

Circle one answer for each. This is for learning, not for passing or failing.

1. Who is the best expert on a child's needs?

- ☐ The child's family (and the child) ☐ The newest volunteer ☐ Whoever is leading that day

2. Which phrase is the most respectful?

- ☐ Wheelchair-bound ☐ Uses a wheelchair ☐ Confined to a chair

3. After you ask a child a question, you should...

- ☐ Answer it for them ☐ Wait about 10 seconds ☐ Ask a different child

4. A "first / then" card helps because it...

- ☐ Shows what's coming next ☐ Is a reward chart ☐ Replaces the lesson

5. A child's tablet is their communication device. You should...

- ☐ Put it away during the lesson ☐ Keep it with them and give time to use it ☐ Only allow it at snack

6. During a meltdown, the best first step is to...

- ☐ Ask why they're upset ☐ Stay calm, use few words, and lower the noise ☐ Warn them they'll miss snack

7. Flapping or rocking that isn't hurting anyone should be...

- ☐ Stopped right away ☐ Allowed; it may help the child stay calm ☐ Reported to the pastor

8. To guide a child's hands, use...

- ☐ Hand-over-hand ☐ Hand-under-hand, after asking ☐ Firmly hold their wrists

9. How many adults should be with a child at all times?

- ☐ One is fine ☐ At least two ☐ It depends on the day

10. Before posting a photo of a child, you need...

- ☐ Written permission from the family ☐ The child to smile ☐ Nothing, if it's at church

ANSWER KEY · COVER BEFORE COPYING

A, B, C = first, second, third option.

1. A · 2. B · 3. B · 4. A · 5. B · 6. B · 7. B · 8. B ·
9. B · 10. A

NAME & MINISTRY

TALK ABOUT IT

Which answer surprised you? Which support will you try first this Sunday? What do you still have questions about? Write your questions here and give them to your leader.

PRINTABLE

Commitment cards (4 per page)

Hand out at the end of the training. Volunteers keep the card; collect a copy if you'd like to follow up.



CELEBRATE 3.21 I'm an Everyone Belongs volunteer! One thing I'll do to help every child feel welcome: Supports I'll use (check all): <table border="0"> <tr> <td>☐ Show what's next</td> <td>☐ Wait time</td> </tr> <tr> <td>☐ Show, don't tell</td> <td>☐ Lower the noise</td> </tr> <tr> <td>☐ Offer choices</td> <td>☐ Ask the family</td> </tr> </table> Name: _____ <i>"Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you." Romans 15:7</i>	☐ Show what's next	☐ Wait time	☐ Show, don't tell	☐ Lower the noise	☐ Offer choices	☐ Ask the family	CELEBRATE 3.21 I'm an Everyone Belongs volunteer! One thing I'll do to help every child feel welcome: Supports I'll use (check all): <table border="0"> <tr> <td>☐ Show what's next</td> <td>☐ Wait time</td> </tr> <tr> <td>☐ Show, don't tell</td> <td>☐ Lower the noise</td> </tr> <tr> <td>☐ Offer choices</td> <td>☐ Ask the family</td> </tr> </table> Name: _____ <i>"Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you." Romans 15:7</i>	☐ Show what's next	☐ Wait time	☐ Show, don't tell	☐ Lower the noise	☐ Offer choices	☐ Ask the family
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CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION

Everyone Belongs Volunteer

This certifies that

completed Volunteer Inclusion Training and is ready to help every
person know they belong in God's family.

Church / ministry

Date

"Now you are the body of Christ, and each of you is a member of it."

1 Corinthians 12:27

