

# Wonder, Wiggle, Worship: Engaging Neurodivergent Children in Faith



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# About Me:

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# Neurodiversity– what is it?

Neurodiversity is a term that explains differences in how people think, process, and experience the world. The term helps the definition that these are natural variations, not deficits.

Neurodivergent individuals might experience worship in ways that aren't always visible but are deeply felt.

Many neurodivergent people have experienced church as exclusionary, not because of intention, but lack of awareness.

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# Barriers to Worship for Neurodiverse Kids

- Sensory Issues
  - Bright lights, Crowds, Loud Music, Strong smells (Coffee, Perfume, Incense)
- Need for routine and predictability
  - Unclear transitions in worship, abstract language without visuals, long sermons
- Fear of judgement and negative past experiences

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## Gifts Already Built in to Lean On



LITURGY



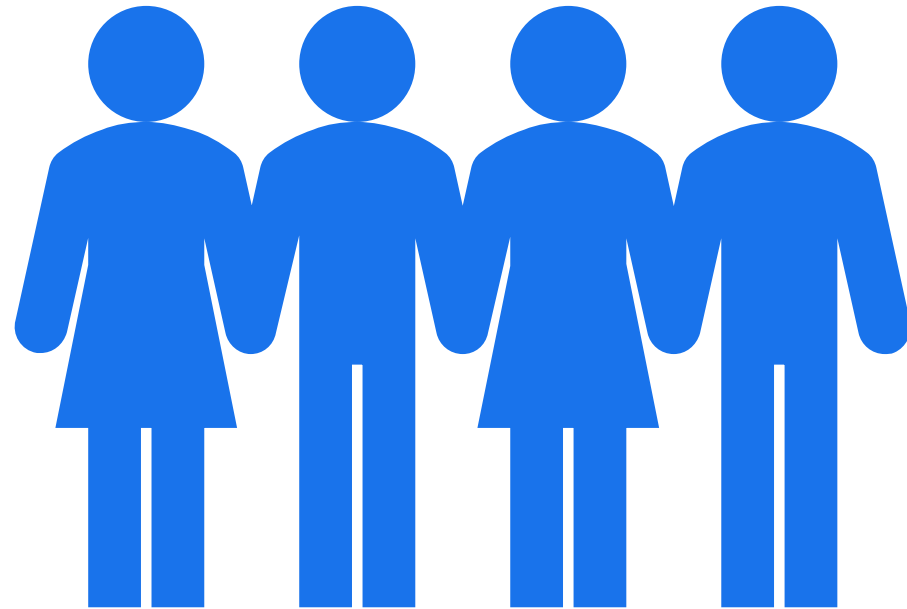
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RUBRICS

# Practical Strategies for Inclusive Worship

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# Prepare the Space

## Visual Supports

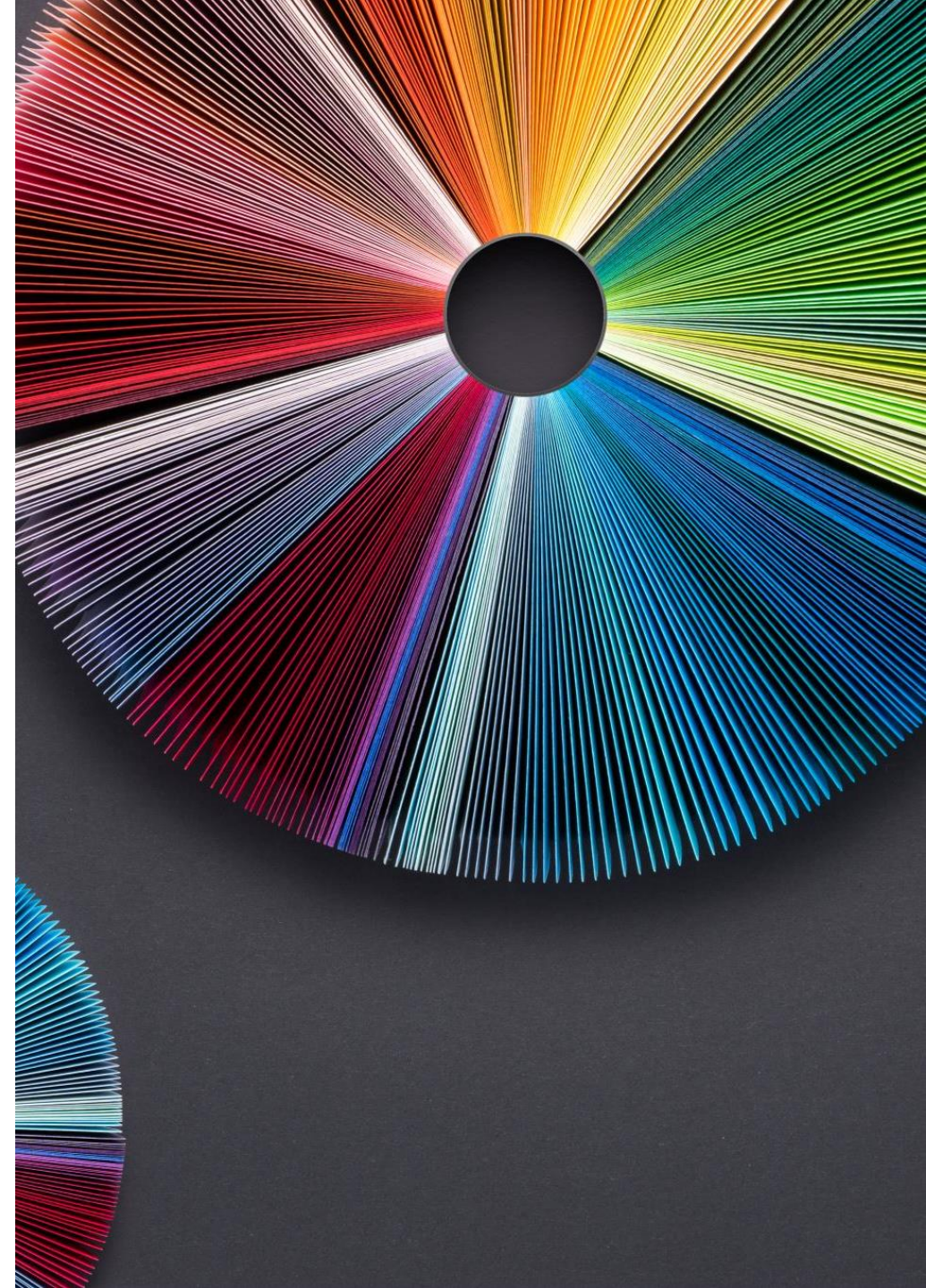
- Simple worship visuals (icons, pictures, colors)
- Visual order of worship posted or handed out

## Sensory Options

- Noise-reducing headphones or earplugs
- Fidget tools available without shame
- Designated quiet or movement space (Sensory Sanctuary)

## Predictability

- Consistent liturgical patterns



# Visual Cues Examples



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# Sensory Tools



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# Expand Participation

## Multiple Ways to Engage

- Standing, sitting, rocking, or pacing
- Drawing during sermons
- Movement during hymns

## Language Matters–

- “Find a way your body can listen”
- “All bodies worship differently”

# Rethink Children's Presence

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01

Name children  
positively from the  
front

02

Normalize sound  
and movement

03

Model curiosity  
instead of  
correction



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# Where to begin?

- Connect with the family
  - Find ways to connect with the child, and their parents
  - Not every tool or option is the best option for every neurodiverse child
  - Ask questions for holy imagination: What makes your child feel safe? How do they react when they come to worship? How can we best support your family to join us in worship?

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## Case Study: Candy (Mom) Amanda (Neurodiverse Daughter)

1

What are some things that we learn from the conversation with Candy?

2

How does Candy perceive the community she worships in with her daughter?

3

Where could you begin to offer support for Candy, Amanda, and families who may feel similar?