

Welcoming a Student with Autism

Visiting a new church can be tough for anyone, but for kids who have autism (and their families) visiting new environments are especially challenging. Learn more about what you can do to help make visits more welcoming.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a condition related to brain development that impacts how a person perceives and socializes with others. It can also include limited and repetitive patterns of behavior. Currently, Autism is diagnosed in three levels – With Level 1 requiring some support, Level 2 requiring substantial support, and Level 3 requiring very substantial support.

While every person who has autism is unique, there are a few common things to know that can be helpful when a new student visits your classroom.

1. Be Clear with Communication

- Use specific and concrete language. Do not skip steps with directions.
- Use “First, Next” language. “First, we will sing.” “Next, we will do crafts.”
- Use visual aids to reinforce communication.
- If appropriate, ask a teacher or buddy to stay close to the student to help guide him or answer any questions.

2. Be Aware of Sensory Differences

- People on the spectrum commonly have sensory processing differences that can make some sounds, sights, smells, tastes, and textures feel very overwhelming.
- If a student acts out or shows signs of overload, let him take a break in a calmer environment, or make the environment calmer for him.

3. Ask Questions

It’s important to gather some information about the new student when he comes to class. This can help you be better prepared to meet his needs. Talk to his parents. You can start by asking these questions.

- **What does your child like?** Is there something that makes him feel at ease?
- **What should we avoid?** Is there anything that is a trigger?
- **What would you like us to do if your child has a hard time?** Some parents may give helpful tips for calming their child, while others may ask you to call them if their child struggles. Listen to learn and respect what they have to share.

4. Make the Family Feel Welcome and Invite Them Back!