

Disability Inclusion and the Restroom

Creating accessible church environments for people who have disabilities means looking at everything from a new perspective - and this includes the restroom.

Let's look at a few things your church should consider as you strive to meet the needs of your ministry teams and the people who you serve.

Adapted Policies

When it comes disability inclusion and the restroom it is important to understand that people and churches will have different needs.

- **One Size Does Not Fit All** - Some students may need assistance with the physical elements of the restroom, while others may need assistance with knowing what steps to take. One requires physical interaction and the other requires verbal prompting or social story reminders. Policies should take both needs into account.
- **Agree Ahead Of Time** - How your church decides to assist these needs may be different from what another church decides. What matters most is that policies are set BEFORE you need them and that the church leaders, volunteers, family and students are all in agreement on the plans.

What You Might Expect

Most of the time taking a student who has a developmental disability, such as Autism, to the restroom goes as you would expect - no issues. However, there are some things that you may encounter, that you should be aware of ahead of time.

- **Modesty** - Some students may not follow social norms regarding modesty in the bathroom, and may be much more open about it. If this happens, understand that this is not uncommon in students who have developmental disabilities. However a plan that promotes dignity and comfort for everyone should be put in place.
- **Transitions** - Transitioning from one activity to another can be hard for many students, especially those who have developmental disabilities. Be prepared for this by reviewing transition strategies, such as those featured in our Wonderful Works Transitions video.
- **Eloping** - Some students, especially those on the autism spectrum, may be prone to eloping. Eloping means to run away. Since going to the restroom involves leaving class, it is extra important to be aware of this risk, keep eyes on the student, and make sure that exits are secured.

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Leaders and Volunteers

When deciding how to handle disability inclusion and the restroom, it is important to take everyone's comfort level into account. If there are aspects of restroom assistance, including the risk of elopement, that make a ministry leader or volunteer feel uncomfortable, it's OK to ask parents or caregivers to take students to the restroom if needed. Disability ministry is all about communication and partnership between church and family, and that includes the restroom too.

Adult Sized Changing Table

Differences with the restroom don't stop with kids ministry. Anyone in the church can have needs that are not met by a standard restroom. This is why it's important for churches to have a Family Bathroom that includes an Adult Sized Changing Table.

- **Think About It** - If an adult needs to be changed, if there is not a Adult Sized Changing Table available for use in a Family Bathroom, what would they most likely have to do? The answer is, they would either not be able to freshen up or they would have to be laid on the public bathroom floor. Stop and think about how this would feel. How could your church promote dignity for all instead?

- **Resources**

FIRST...

To learn more about how to create a more accessible church, check out Ability Ministry's Church Campus Accessibility Checklist available on abilityministry.com

THEN...

Visit max-ability.com (or another retailer) and shop for Adult Sized Changing Tables, OR...

Connect with Ryan Wolfe from Ability Ministry - abilityministry.com and find out about other other ways to help equip your church to promote dignity for all in the restroom. To learn more, go to the contact link and put

"I would like more information about Universal Sized Changing Tables" in the message.