

Mobility Impairment & Church Inclusion

Churches want to welcome everyone. However, often, churches don't realize how many hidden barriers exist for people with mobility impairments.

Today we look at four barriers to consider.

1. Parking

- The more parking spaces a lot has, the more accessible (handicap) parking spaces the lot should offer too. For every six accessible spaces there should also be at least one accessible van space. Accessible van spaces are different than other accessible spaces because they have Access Aisles next to them. Access Aisles are the diagonal lines that reserve space for an accessible van to unload its passengers with a lift or ramp. Without this space, the lift or ramp cannot be extended and the passenger cannot enter or exit the van.
- This means that even if a church has many accessible parking spaces, but only one accessible van parking space, then only one family who relies on a mobility device that requires a van may come to church. Therefore, it's important to have enough general accessible parking spaces and accessible van parking spaces.
- To learn more about accessible parking, check out ada.gov. Also be sure to check your local regulations and your specific organization's guidelines.

2. Restrooms

- Be aware that not all accessible stalls work for both manual and power wheel chairs. This is because some mobility devices require more room for navigation, like turning, than many accessible stalls provide. Other issues may also be present.
- Having a Family Bathroom is important, because many times, an individual who needs assistance in the restroom may have a caregiver with a different gender. Being able to have a place where both can go and have privacy matters.
- It is also important for Family Bathrooms to have Adult Sized Changing Tables, so that the individual can have a place to be changed that is sanitary and dignified.

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3. Access

- In addition to having a ramp at your main entrance, also make sure to have a ramp at your main stage. This allows everyone to have a chance to be part of the Praise Team or speak to the congregation.
- Look to see if all meeting rooms have doors that are wide enough for wheelchairs to go through. Also, if they are up the stairs, see if there is a ramp, lift, or elevator access.
- See if your children's play areas are inclusive for children with mobility devices. If not, see what adaptations need to be made so that every child can have fun.

4. Assumptions

- Social inclusion is important, but making assumptions about individuals with disabilities can be a huge barrier!
- Never assume that someone with a physical disability also has an intellectual impairment. This is usually not the case. Get to know each person as an individual.
- Never assume that someone with a physical disability wants to sit on the sidelines when their peers are engaging in sports. Instead, talk to them about how they would like to be part of the activity. Inclusion may look like being part of the coaching team, score keeping, or cheer squad. Or the individual may like to have a buddy help them be part of the game.
- Never assume you know how someone feels. Sometimes, even a very outgoing person may get quiet and act like they are not interested in an activity if it involves movements that are hard for them to do. In reality, they may just be trying to cope with not being able to do something. Find a different way to include them, such as inviting them to do something with you that you can both do!

ONE MORE THING - Creating a welcoming church starts by learning. Invite someone with a mobility impairment to your church and let them teach you what it looks like from their perspective. Then invite them into the conversation on next steps for making things better.