Setting ALL Students Up for Success - Part 2
Universal Design

What is universal design and why does it matter at church?

Universal design is the design and composition of the environment so that it can be accessed, understood, and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability, or disability.

A good way to understand universal design is to compare steps to a ramp. Only people who can walk can go up steps, but everyone, including people who use mobility devices like wheelchairs, can access a ramp. Therefore, a ramp is an example of universal design. It works for everyone but is essential for some.

When we apply this same principle to our classrooms we remove obstacles that make church difficult for many kids, such as those who use mobility devices and those who have developemental disabilities like autism. This matters because when the environment is easier to navigate, a student's emotions are easier to navigate too. Which means that everyone can have a better day at church.

Three Tips for Universal Design in the Classroom

1. Look At Your Space-

The first step to creating an environment that works for everyone, is to look at the space you have now. And then ask yourself a few important questions.

• Could someone who uses a mobility device, such as a walker or a wheelchair, access every part of the room? If not, what needs to be changed?

• Would someone who has sensitive senses, like many people on the Autism Spectrum feel comfortable here? This includes thinking about the volume of music, noticing any strong odors or fragrances, and evaluating the brightness of your lighting.

• Is your room organized in a way that makes visual sense? Do you have clearly designated areas for each activity? Have you incorporated visual boundaries to communicate expectations? For more on this, check out **Wonderful Works Autism and Visual Boundaries**.

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful, I know that full well. - Psalm 139:14

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2. Incorporate Visual Aids-

Using visual aids is an evidence-based intervention that helps children with intellectual disabilities process information better.* Visual aids also help everyone else in the class understand expectations too!

- **Label Activity stations with words and graphics**
- **Offer a visual schedule of your daily routine**
- **Use irst/then boards to break down tasks to two at a time**
- **Post important reminders around the room**
- **And much more**

Visit the Adapted Discipleship **Customizable Classroom Tool Maker** to make free visual aids of your own. (Available on desktop and laptop computers only).

3. Be Prepared for Adaptions-

Understand that no matter what you do, sometimes adaptions will still be needed. So be prepared to meet the specific needs of students by having some adapted resources available,

- **Noise cancelling headphones that help reduce volume**
- **Fidgets that give restless students a positive outlet**
- **A sensory break area to help students find their calm**
- **Listening ears! Invite students and their families to tell you what works for them, then work together.**

One More Thing...

Remember that what we do at church does not just stay at church. When we make people feel included (or excluded), those feelings hang on long after church is over. They can shape the way a person sees the world and how they fit (or don't fit) into it. And that can have a far-reaching impact on the universe all around us. When we take the time to consider how to make our spaces accessible to all, we show Christ's love in a very important way, and that is good for everyone!

"So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other." John 13:34

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your works are wonderful, I know that full well. - Psalm 139:14**