



THE CHURCH  
OF ENGLAND  
SUFFOLK

# Disability and Inclusion

Welcoming people with  
disabilities



# Welcome

In Britain, the latest estimates from the Family Resources Survey indicate that 14.6 million people in the UK had a disability in the 2020/21 financial year. This represents 22% of the total population.

(source: [www.commonslibrary.parliament.uk](http://www.commonslibrary.parliament.uk))

About 95% of us will experience disability at some time during our life. If you became disabled and wanted to continue attending your church, how easy would that be?

In this diocese, we celebrate the inclusion, contribution, and ministry of disabled people, acknowledging that the church community is only complete when all are welcome. We aim to support all congregations to ensure that our buildings, activities, and services are welcoming and accessible for disabled people.

*Paul, the apostle, wrote, "those parts that seem to be weaker are indispensable" (1 Cor 12.22)*

## **Accessibility: What do we mean by 'accessibility'?**

If something is 'accessible', everyone can use it without discrimination.

Accessibility therefore applies to everything – for example, projected and printed material, the physical building, the way we talk and so on can all help (or hinder) people.

**We should aim to help everyone feel welcome and valued and included (inclusive) and avoid anyone feeling ignored or left out (discriminated against).**



# The physical building - can people get in?

If you or someone you know finds a building or services hard to access, tell the church leadership. If there is a particular thing that would help, let them know.

We want buildings to be as accessible as possible but before you do anything to a building, remember you must speak to your Archdeacon or DAC Secretary.

Here are some ideas to make your church accessible to all:

- An access ramp or entrance is for everyone; it helps wheelchair users but also anyone who might find negotiating steps tricky and that includes parents with children in 'buggies'.
- Don't forget ramps need handrails and edges too.
- It might be that there are steps into the building. Even a small step (10mm) can hinder a wheelchair or mobility aid. If the step can't be removed or altered, at least mark it so it's obvious (a white or yellow strip will also help someone with a visual impairment).
- A larger step may require a ramp - if that can't be a permanent ramp, have a removable one to hand and make sure that someone is on hand who knows where it is and how to use it safely.
- Sets of steps are often better overcome with a permanent ramp. These can be expensive.
- Finally, check out if there is another entrance which might be easier to make accessible?



# The physical building - Where do I go now I'm in?

Once in the building is the building accessible?

- Is there somewhere for a wheelchair, mobility aid or children's buggy to be positioned?
- Some people are able to transfer from a wheelchair into a chair or even a pew - they will want to have their wheelchair easily accessible again.
- If they wish to stay in their wheelchair, make sure they have good sight lines and with the main congregation.
- If there are chairs, make sure some have arms that help people get up and down.
- Is the toilet 'accessible' (not disabled; unusable or not working).
- If there is just one toilet, it should be an accessible one. Able-bodied people are quite welcome to use accessible toilets as well as regular ones as long as they are not preventing a person with a disability using it.

Check out this video by Oxford Diocese's Disability Advisor, the Revd Katie Tupling highlights some of the ways you can make your buildings and worship more accessible, from small changes that make a big difference to what to consider when making larger changes View it here: <https://youtu.be/s82ySbLAOXs>

Details on our website [here](#).

## IMPORTANT NOTE

The whole area of physical access to buildings is complex and must meet the requirements of the law (The Building Regulations). Many church buildings will also need permission from the diocese (a Faculty) especially where there needs to be a change to the fabric of the building.

Never do anything without first speaking to your Archdeacon or DAC Secretary.

# The spoken word - Microphones, Sound Systems and Hearing Loops

## Sound Systems and Hearing Loops

We all need access to the spoken word. Many people of all ages use hearing aids. Some modern hearing aids use blue-tooth technology. Many will pick up a signal from a hearing loop and help the user to hear. Here are a few ideas to help you:

- The sound system is there to reinforce a voice and take it to other parts of the building.
- The hearing loop needs an input from the microphone in the sound system.
- Whether or not someone has a clear strong voice, the sound system will help others to hear.
- Remember, 'I don't need a microphone!' is not an acceptable excuse.
- If a church has a hearing loop, anyone speaking needs to use the microphone to produce an input to the loop.
- Do remember to check with someone that it is working!
- Be aware that it may only work in certain parts of the building.
- Encourage users to speak using their normal voice volume into the microphone.
- You might need to consider people who lip-read and the visibility of the speaker eg encourage people not to cover their mouths or turn away when they are speaking.



# The spoken word - Braille/Signing

## Signing

This is a specialist area but not one to be ignored. If there is someone or a group of people in your congregation who use British Sign Language (BSL) they may have access to a signer.

## Braille

This reading and writing system was at one time was available in book format only. But today blind people can use electronic braille devices. They can connect a refreshable Braille display to computers, smartphones and tablets to fully access braille without being loaded down with a bulky heavy book.

- You don't necessarily have to have your service books converted.

## Too much noise

Some neurodiverse people have a hyper-sensitivity to sound. 'Neuro-diverse' means having a brain that works differently from the average or 'neurotypical' person. This may be differences in social preferences, ways of learning, ways of communicating and/or ways of perceiving the environment.

- They and other people might just prefer to be in a quieter area.

Details on our website [here](#).



# Projected words and pictures

Projecting words and pictures onto a screen has many advantages. Here are a few tips to guide you:

- It's not good practice to use ALL CAPITALS for words. Most people recognise words by their shape. Using all CAPITALS slows down all readers and particularly people who may have slower reading speeds (like most young children!).
- Words should be a good contrast to the background.
- Don't project words over pictures - it's a distraction and makes them hard to read.
- Don't use a white background either - it's too bright and gives too much contrast.
- The best background is a dark colour like deep blue with a good contrast for the text.
- Consider having the words the minister is using in white and the parts which people need to join in with bold yellow.
- Keep the number of words to a 'slide' to a minimum.
- The whole verse of a song is enough.
- Try to use a good clear font like Gill Sans, Trebuchet or Calibri.
- Ensure the font is no smaller than 28pt.
- Bear in mind some people cannot read the screen - it may be too high for them to lift their head or their eyesight won't allow them.
- Have a large print copy of what is being projected ready to offer to them.

You might want to consider how people who have autism access printed materials. It can help to have white space on a page and to use icons and images instead of words. The best thing is to ask what would help.



## Words to use (and words to avoid)

The term 'neuro-diverse' means having a brain that works differently from the average or 'neurotypical' person. A person who is neurodiverse may learn in a different way, communicate in a different way, have different social preferences and perceive the environment differently. The term usually refers to range of specific learning differences including:

- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Developmental Co-ordination Disorder (DCD) also referred to as Dyspraxia
- Developmental Language Disorder (DLD)
- Epilepsy
- Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder
- Intellectual disability
- Tourettes and Tic disorders
- Specific learning disorder/ differences eg Dyslexia, Dyscalculia

Some of the words that we may have grown up using are not acceptable to people with disabilities today. There are some suggestions of words to avoid on the next page.





USE	AVOID
disabled (people)	(the) handicapped, (the) disabled
has [name of condition or impairment]	afflicted by, suffers from, victim of
wheelchair user	confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair-bound
with a learning disability / disabilities	mentally handicapped, mentally defective, retarded, subnormal
disabled person or person with a disability	cripple, invalid
person with cerebral palsy	Spastic
non-disabled	able-bodied
person with a mental health condition	mental patient, insane, mad
deaf, user of British Sign Language (BSL), person with a hearing loss	deaf and dumb; deaf mute
people with visual impairments; blind people; partially sighted people	the blind
person with epilepsy, diabetes, depression or someone who has epilepsy, diabetes, depression	an epileptic, diabetic, depressive, and so on
someone with restricted growth or short stature	dwarf; midget
seizures	fits, spells, attacks

# Printed Material and Inclusive Language

## Printed Material

There may be service books, weekly bulletins and hymn/song books, etc., but are there large print versions available to offer to anyone who would find them easier to access? There are some people who find usual size print easier to read if it's printed on a pale coloured paper such as light green - they might ask if it could be available for some things.

## Inclusive Language

People can feel offended and alienated when inappropriate terms are used to describe their disability or illness. The words we use can reinforce prejudices, define people by their disability and label people as victims. It is important we are sensitive to this. Using acceptable words and phrases can also help us be more open to another person's needs. However, there is a risk that we become so anxious about making a mistake that we become over-sensitive and avoid talking about the disability at all.

In this section, there are some helpful guidelines to enable open communication with people with a range of disabilities.

### Some general tips on how to communicate:

- Use a normal tone of voice. Avoid sounding as though you are being patronising or talking down to the person.
- Avoid attempts to speak or finish a sentence for the person you are talking to.
- Address disabled people in the same way as you talk to everyone else.
- Speak directly to a disabled person, even if they have an interpreter or companion with them. This is particularly important if someone is a wheelchair user.
- When talking to a wheelchair user, whenever possible sit on a chair so you are at the same height rather than talking down to them."

### Positive not negative

- Focus on describing the disability or illness as part of the whole person. Avoiding negative descriptions enables us to be more aware of the perspective of the person we are addressing. For example, avoid phrases like 'suffers from' which suggest discomfort, constant pain and a sense of hopelessness.
- Another term to avoid is describing someone as being "confined" to a wheelchair. A wheelchair is a mobility aid which enables the wheelchair user to get around more easily.

Details on our website [here](#).

# Websites

The website is often the first way a disabled person will try to find out whether a church is accessible for them. Here are some suggestions:

- Have a section which specifies that the church is committed to disability inclusion and gives an opportunity for any questions about accessibility.
- Publicise that the church has a 'Roofbreaker' (disability champion) willing to meet with people to assist with inclusion.
- Include the 'Roofbreaker' in information about church staff/volunteers on the website
- Try and include welcoming language and positive images/photos of disabled people (ideally from your church).
- List features likely to assist accessibility, eg blue badge parking, level access, induction loop, large print, accessible toilet, assistance dogs welcome and more.
- Give information that will help people know what to expect when they come to the church – when they arrive, during the service, and afterwards.
- Try to ensure that the website itself is easy to read and can also be read by people using screen-readers.

Here are a few technical things to try:

- Use a sans-serif font with dark text on a plain off-white background.
- Use title tags for photos/images so that a screen-reader will give some short text describing the image.
- Include subtitles on videos.
- Put alt or title text on any links to give a quick description.
- Information in a graphic (eg a flyer for an event) also needs the text in the body of the website for many people and screen-readers to be able to read them.

For guidance on accessible websites see the WCAG 2.1 guidelines available from [w3.org](http://w3.org)

Finally do liaise with your 'Roofbreaker' and disabled people for feedback on the website - ask for their comments on the website's accessibility and the usefulness of accessibility information - don't assume, always ask!

Details on our website [here](#).

# Collective terms and labels

- The word 'disabled' is a description not a group of people. Use 'disabled people' not 'the disabled' as the collective term.
- However, many deaf people whose first language is BSL consider themselves part of 'the deaf community' – they may describe themselves as 'Deaf', with a capital D, to emphasise their deaf identity.
- Avoid medical labels. They say little about people as individuals and tend to reinforce stereotypes of disabled people as 'patients' or unwell.
- Don't automatically refer to 'disabled people' in all communications – many people who need disability benefits and services don't identify with this term. Consider using 'people with health conditions or impairments' if it seems more appropriate.

## Everyday phrases

- Most disabled people are comfortable with the words used to describe daily living. People who use wheelchairs 'go for walks', and people with visual impairments may be very pleased – or not – 'to see you'. An impairment may just mean that some things are done in a different way.
- Common phrases that may associate impairments with negative things should be avoided, for example 'deaf to our pleas' or 'blind drunk'.

## Dementia Friendly Church

The needs of people who have dementia are many and various. The best thing is to work with them and their carers to find out what would help the most. There is some very helpful advice here: [www.dementiafriendlychurch.org.uk/resource-pack](http://www.dementiafriendlychurch.org.uk/resource-pack)

[Details on our website here.](#)

