

SOMETIMES IT IS TOO MUCH

FACILITATOR GUIDE: NEURODIVERSITY AND THE CHURCH

Focus: Welcoming Children Who Find Worship Overwhelming

Opening Prayer (Facilitator prays aloud)

Holy and gracious God, You are the Creator of all life and the Author of diversity. We thank You for the wide array of ways Your children experience the world, learn, and worship. Open our eyes to see the image of Christ in every person, our ears to hear voices that have been silenced, and our hearts to receive the gifts that neurodiverse children and families bring to our community. As we begin this time together, still our minds, help us to listen with compassion, and guide us toward practices that make our churches more welcoming, inclusive, and life-giving. In the name of Jesus, who welcomed the little ones and blessed them, we pray. Amen.

Scripture Reading: Matthew 19:14

“Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.’”

Facilitator Notes To Share During Reflection (optional):

- Jesus invited children when others tried to keep them away.
- The disciples assumed children didn’t belong in the center of religious life—Jesus corrected them.
- Challenge: Who are we unintentionally keeping away from worship today?
- For many neurodiverse children, barriers may not be intentional, but they are real.

Understanding Neurodiversity

Key Terms

- Neurodiversity: Natural variations in how people think, learn, and experience the world. Difference, not deficit.
- Neurotypical: Describes people whose learning, communication, and behavior fit within social expectations.
- Neurodivergent: Refers to people whose brains process and interact differently—in areas like learning, attention, communication, or sensory experience.

Understanding Neurodiversity (cont.)

Common Examples

- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD): Communication and sensory differences; strengths include deep focus and honesty.
- ADHD: Challenges with attention and impulsivity; strengths include creativity and energy.
- Dyslexia & Learning Differences: Difficulties with reading/processing; strengths often in problem-solving or oral communication.
- Sensory Processing Differences: Sensitivity to sound, light, or crowds; worship spaces may feel overwhelming.
- Facilitator note: Stress that every neurodiverse individual is unique. Labels are descriptive, not definitive.

Video Viewing

Show: Big Faith Resources video *Sometimes It Is Too Much*, which can be found at

<https://bigfaithresources.com/big-faith-resources-video>

Facilitator instructions: Invite participants to jot down emotions or personal connections while watching. Lead group discussion. Lead with openness; don't rush responses.

- What emotions or thoughts came up for you as you watched the video?
- What specific moments in the video made you feel connected to the child's or family's experience?
- How do our current worship practices support or challenge someone experiencing sensory overload?
- Have you ever noticed someone struggling during worship—child or adult? How did the congregation respond?
- How might our expectations of “appropriate behavior” unintentionally exclude or shame neurodivergent individuals? Voices from the Church

Share the provided quote aloud to deepen reflection. Rev. Lamar Hardwick, *Disability and the Church*, said, “True belonging begins when communities stop asking people to adapt to the church and start adapting the church to fit the people.”



Re-centering the Challenge

The facilitator may want to revisit the opening words shared in the video.

“Despite strides in inclusivity, neurodiverse children (and their families) often face exclusion in church, especially corporate worship, hindering their engagement in faith practices and fellowship. As a result, half of the parents of children with special needs skip religious activities due to a lack of support.”

Transition suggestion:

The Facilitator reads aloud. “Having conversations like these helps build awareness and encourage more support to address belonging and neurodiversity in our faith communities.”

Embracing Hope and Renewal

(The facilitator continues to read aloud)

“Each neurodiverse child is unique, with strengths and gifts they bring to the church. The Church has often been slow to adapt to the variety of needs, learning styles, and abilities of all God’s children. But today, we also celebrate the many examples and stories of change, hope, and renewal—signs of the Spirit at work among us.”

Practical Next Steps

Option 1: Worship Audit

Break into small groups. Give each group worship elements (music, lighting, children’s time, fellowship, etc.). Ask:

- How might this create barriers for neurodiverse individuals?
- What small adjustments could help?

Option 2: Commitment Card

Give each participant a card. Invite them to write:

- One way they can create belonging for neurodiverse families.
- One idea to share with church leadership.

Facilitator note: Cards can be collected for accountability or kept as personal reminders.

Facilitator note: Thank participants for their time. Invite them to consider how to consider this discussion or when to reconvene for additional study and reflection as you learn together about neurodiversity in the Church.

Closing Prayer (Facilitator prays aloud)

God of love and welcome,
We thank You for this time of learning and reflection.
Your kingdom belongs to children of every background, ability, and way of being.
Guide us to notice who feels left out,
help us create spaces of belonging,
and give us joy in celebrating the gifts of all Your children.
Make our churches places of radical hospitality,
where no one is hindered from coming to You.
In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Additional Resources, including handouts, additional videos, and downloadable materials, can be found at BigFaithResources.com.