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# Special Needs Inclusive Easter

## 10 TIPS TO WELCOME SPECIAL FAMILIES

### **1 Accessible Facilities:**

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- ✿ Ramps, wide doorways, and accessible restrooms for enhanced mobility. Install an adult changing table for added convenience.

### **2 Communication, Information, & Welcoming:**

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- ✿ Advance information on Easter service details through various channels.
- ✿ Designate a "Sensory Entrance" with trained greeters for a welcoming experience.

### **3 Inclusive Easter Services:**

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- ✿ Sensory-friendly elements like music, visual supports, and sign language interpreters.
- ✿ Collaboration with Special Needs Ministries or Organizations.

### **4 Sensory-Friendly Service or Quiet Spaces:**

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- ✿ Controlled sensory-friendly service area with buddies for 1:1 assistance.
- ✿ Designated quiet spaces within the church for retreat.

### **5 Visual Schedules:**

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- ✿ Supply visual schedules in advance for service familiarity.

### **6 Sensory Backpacks:**

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- ✿ Available sensory backpacks with essential items for individual comfort.

### **7 Sensory Friendly Easter Egg Hunt:**

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- ✿ Organize a separate sensory-friendly egg hunt with considerate elements.

### **8 Buddy System & Accessibility Training:**

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- ✿ Implement a 1:1 buddy system with trained volunteers.
- ✿ Conduct disability awareness and inclusion training.

### **9 Inclusive Decorations:**

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- ✿ Ensure Easter decorations are sensory-friendly and inclusive.

### **10 Inclusive Programs:**

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- ✿ Tailor programs with inclusivity, involving individuals with special needs.
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# Shared Wisdom

## WHY THE POINTS ARE IMPORTANT

### Accessible Facilities

Ensure that your church facilities are accessible, with ramps, wide doorways, and accessible restrooms. This helps families with mobility challenges feel more comfortable. Provide accessible restrooms equipped with appropriate facilities and consider the needs of individuals with different mobility requirements. Adding an adult changing table would be a huge blessing and easy to do.

### Communication, Information, and Welcoming

Provide information about the Easter service in advance. Clear communication about the schedule, order of service, and any special events will help families prepare for the day. Offer multiple communication channels, such as written materials, online resources, and verbal announcements, to accommodate different communication preferences. Designate a "Sensory Entrance" where you only have 1 or 2 greeters who are trained to have calm voices and little or no-touch greetings. Allow the people entering to initiate the touch. There should be soft lighting and minimal decorations near this entrance.

### Inclusive Easter Services:

Consider incorporating elements into your Easter service that are inclusive of individuals with special needs. This may include sensory-friendly music, visual supports, or sign language interpreters. Collaborate with Special Needs Ministries or Organizations to help you. Use clear and simple language **and a**.

### Sensory-Friendly Service or Quiet Spaces

Offer an entire area where you will have a sensory-friendly service. You can stream the main service but control the lighting and the sound so that our friends can enjoy it. Prepare that space with fidget toys, bean bags, and noise-canceling headphones to make it more welcoming. A huge bonus would be to offer some buddies to assist the parents and work 1:1 with the individual with the service becomes too much so that the parents can still focus on the service. Still staff this space with ushers like a normal service! If you don't do that, then create designated quiet spaces within the church where families can retreat if someone needs a break from the sensory stimuli of the service. Equip these spaces with comfortable seating, soft lighting, and sensory-friendly items like fidget toys or noise-canceling headphones.

### Visual Schedules:

Provide visual schedules or timelines for the Easter service, detailing the various components and transitions. Knowing what to expect can be reassuring for individuals with special needs. Make these schedules available in advance so that individuals with special needs can review and become familiar with the service structure.

### Sensory Backpacks:

Make sensory backpacks available that families can check out for their individuals. In the backpack are noise-canceling headphones, earplugs, fidget toys, dollar-store sunglasses, a visual schedule or social story, some paper and crayons. This will help them when the need arises to be prepared and make it through the service.

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## Sensory Friendly Easter Egg Hunt

Organize a sensory-friendly Easter egg hunt, perhaps with larger, easy-to-find eggs, or eggs with tactile elements. Put some eggs on haybales so that individuals in wheelchairs can pick them up as they wheel by. Consider having a separate area for this event to cater specifically to the needs of children with sensory challenges, or offer the event 30-60 minutes earlier than your regular egg hunt so that the families can leave before there are too many people and commotion.

## Buddy System & Accessibility Training

Implement a buddy system (1:1) where trained volunteers or church members can offer assistance and support to families with special needs during the Easter service. Buddies can help, support, and companionship, helping families feel more comfortable and welcomed. They just need to be willing to be a friend, you can train them everything else they need to know. Train your staff and volunteers in disability awareness and inclusion. Include information on different types of disabilities, communication strategies, and best practices for creating an inclusive environment. This will help create a more welcoming environment and ensure that everyone feels valued and respected.

## Inclusive Easter Decorations::

Ensure that your Easter decorations are inclusive and considerate of individuals with sensory sensitivities. Consider using softer lighting and avoiding decorations that may be distracting or overwhelming for individuals with sensory sensitivities.

## Inclusive Easter Programs

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Remember, it's essential to cultivate an atmosphere of acceptance and understanding. By making deliberate efforts to accommodate families with special needs, your church can create a more fulfilling and meaningful Easter experience for everyone. By following these tips, a church can move beyond mere accommodation and actively strive towards building an environment where individuals and families with special needs feel genuinely embraced and valued during the Easter celebration.

## GET IN TOUCH WITH SOAR FOR ASSISTANCE WITH INCLUSIVITY

If you're looking for assistance with inclusivity or any of the tips mentioned, feel free to contact SOAR at [www.SOARSpecialNeeds.org](http://www.SOARSpecialNeeds.org) or send an email to [doc@SOARSpecialNeeds.org](mailto:doc@SOARSpecialNeeds.org).



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