

# Meeting the Needs of Teens and Adults on the Autism Spectrum

## Young Children May:

- Not speak at all
- Need enclosed space
- Not socialize with others
- Only talk about certain topics
- Need anxiety support about changes in routine/time
- Grab or take from others
- Not respect personal space
- React badly to light touch
- Appear not to be listening
- Need very specific instructions
- Need picture instruction
- May avoid eye contact
- May react to frustration with meltdown
- May bolt or wander from space
- May resist washing hands
- May chew or lick objects
- May attempt to eat non-edible items

## CHECKLIST

EASY changes any church can incorporate

1. "I Don't Feel Like Talking Today" tags
2. Signs for transition rather than verbal instruction
3. Sensory Aids (These are ALWAYS voluntary)
  - a. Weighted blankets/vests
  - b. Earmuffs
  - c. Fleecies or Kushies
  - d. Trampolines
4. Picture instruction for flow of the activity
5. Picture signs for restrooms/snacks
6. Provide enclosed CALM SPACE
7. Keep watchful eyes
8. Use SILENT redirection with a visual stimulant
9. Be sure all items used are non-toxic, even for older children
10. Provide support to parents and avoid judgment or criticism of their methods

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4. Specific written outline of service or lesson plan
5. Reduce anxiety with a countdown clock
6. Use visual presentations
7. Avoid overstimulation by sound or sensation
8. If venue changed, bring all written "rules" that will apply in new space
9. Redirection from their preferred topic may be difficult, find out from parents or discuss with teen a signal to "listen not talk."
10. If a lesson uses metaphor, provide written definitions
11. Predetermined CALM SPACE
12. Allow teen to face away from group or change seating if overstimulated
13. Allow teen to participate non-verbally
  - Some participation ideas include
    - Drawing a cartoon or comic strip
    - Writing (although many have difficulty with handwriting – use of a computer is helpful)
    - Selecting and playing a song
    - Creating something in clay or with legos

## TEENS may:

- appear not to be listening
- not make eye contact
- need very specific instructions
- not socialize with others
- grab or take from others
- not respect personal space or have limited spatial awareness
- need anxiety support about changes in routine/time, will need consistency in meeting/class times
- react with lowered emotional maturity
- focus on details, often aggressively correcting others
- may be physically awkward

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## ADULTS MAY:

- ≈ have difficulty with high-level language skills (reasoning, problem solving, being too literal)
- ≈ display lack of empathy
- ≈ be unable to see another person's point of view
- ≈ have problems engaging in "small talk"
- ≈ show lack of emotional control, particularly with anger, depression, and anxiety
- ≈ need strict adherence to routines which can lead to anxiety when something unexpected happens
- ≈ show an extreme focus on a particular interest or hobby
- ≈ not make eye contact
- ≈ prefer written or visual material over verbal presentation
- ≈ not socialize with others
- ≈ focus on details, often aggressively correcting others

## EASY changes any church can incorporate

1. Specific written outline of service or lesson
2. Detailed agenda (with estimated times) for meetings
3. Reduce anxiety with a countdown clock
4. Use visual presentations
5. Use diagrams to illustrate flow of logic
6. Use movement/calm down breaks
7. Provide formal "ice-breaker" exercises
8. Provide clear written instructions or signage when venue, ritual or norms change
9. Try to provide non-emotional but clear information when feelings are hurt
10. Restrict verbal instruction to one-on-one or low-key sensory surroundings
11. Predetermine a "cool-off" space with soothing environment