

All In

Co-Design and Connect

Communication



Communicating positively with and about people living with disability.



**Patience
leads to
understanding**

Followers of Jesus Christ are called to work together as one body that facilitates everyone's gifts and strengths so the church can fulfil God's plan to share God's love to the world.

Children and young people living with disability are an indispensable part of that body. How they are included matters to God and to how God's church will thrive because God says they are indispensable.

As Christians, we need to facilitate life-enhancing interactions for people living with disability. This means we must address attitude, communication, access and social participation barriers so that opportunities to live, be, and become are equally available to everyone.

"For the body does not consist of one member but of many... God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ... As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I do not need you." Nor can the head say to the feet, "I do not need you." On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable..." (1 Corinthians 12: 14-22, ESV)

Kindness is key

A smile and a simple, "hello" is sometimes all it takes to help a person feel welcome and included. Ensuring a person feels accepted and respected is integral to their self-esteem and wellbeing.

Allow time for response

Needing time to think is important. Take a step back and allow time for a response. It can be helpful and less stressful for people living with disability during conversation when you wait for their reply. Don't try to put words in anyone's mouth or try to predict what they're going to say. If a person asks for help if they cannot think of the word, kindly suggest a few.

Listen deeply

It is okay to ask people with disability questions if you need further clarification about something they have said. Ensure your questions are straightforward.

Listen deeply and follow up to ensure you have understood correctly. It is okay to politely ask the person if they can tell you what they want to say in another way/format.

Stay calm, keep the conversation relaxed and keep your sense of humour; this is beneficial for everyone.



Focus on the person, not the disability

We should not identify a person by their disability.

Use the phrase, 'person living with disability'. This prevents an unintentional suggestion that disability is anything other than a functional limitation.

Communicate in meaningful ways

We all have preferred ways of communicating.

Some people are visual and prefer images, others enjoy reading, while speech is the preferred form of communication for many. Ask how children and young people living with disability prefer to be communicated with by asking them or their families/caregivers.

Employ support strategies

Ask parents and caregivers for effective communication support strategies for their child living with a disability. Ask young people living with a disability what support would enable their full participation.

Include my siblings

Using the term 'living with disability' acknowledges the impact that a disability can have on the whole family.

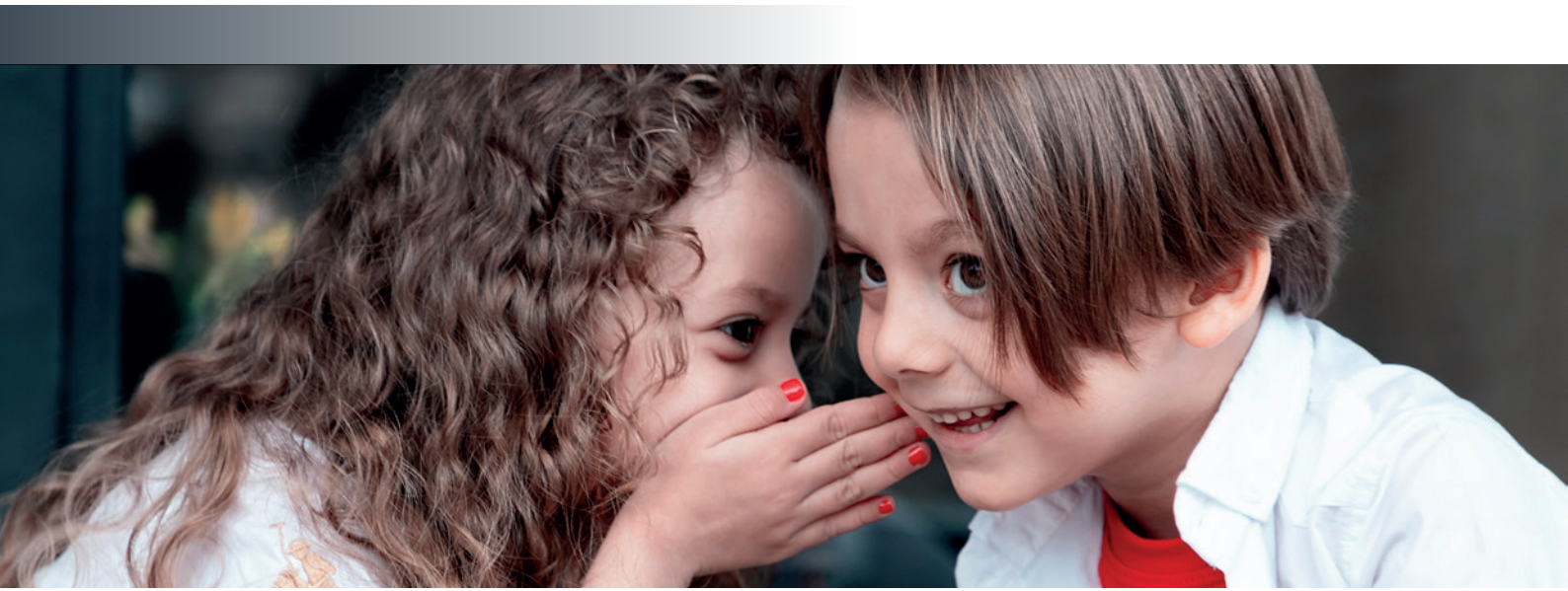
Church can be a safe space where the sibling can talk about their feelings, as other young people do. Siblings may want to be included in church activities or they may prefer space away from their brother or sister. Just ask!

You won't know a person's needs until you ask how you can help

"It helps when people ask me before assuming what support I need."

A parent of a child living with a disability said open, casual, caring and calm conversations are invited with parents and children and young people living with disability, because they know what works best and really want to help things to be successful for everyone.

These conversations are best had in private, where possible. It is a good idea to document the conversation, so it doesn't need to be repeated.



Conversation starters

It can be helpful to have a page or little book with a few photos and information to engage with others and start a conversation more easily. The page or booklet can explain the child or young person living with a disability's interests and passions and include information such as the young person's name, age, parents, siblings, pets, school and favourite activities and interests.

It could include age-appropriate information about the disability and explain any equipment the child or young person uses. It can also say simple ways to support the young person at church.

Support information forms

Support information forms can be used for specific activities such as camps to inform leaders about the most appropriate support for children and young people living with disability.

This content was developed with young people living with disability, care givers/parents with lived experience, and professionals working with young people living with disability. **Funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services.**

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