

Ideas for Inclusion

Confirmation can be tricky as churches and people with disabilities navigate what it means to belong. While impairment in no way diminishes a person's capacity or orientation toward faith, the way churches offer or deny membership to people with disabilities has a lasting impact on their faith and identity. When including people with disabilities in Confirmation, there are some critical factors to consider:

Church Session Requirements

Sessions have specific requirements for Confirmation. As the Confirmation leader, you will need to communicate with the session and find the best way to modify the criteria to include all young people. Common modifications are offering supports, changing the environment, and changing the program. *What supports can you offer?* Using peers or adults or even technology as a support can be enough for some people to meet expectations. *Can the environment be changed?* There may be a more comfortable place to achieve the same aspirations, such as using a small group or warm setting. *Can the program be changed?* Sometimes sessions need to be flexible. Thinking through the reasons for requirements can help you come up with an individual requirement for youth with disabilities.

Curriculum Requirements

We designed our curriculum to include diverse learners, but even with a creative and interactive curriculum, there may be some challenges for students with disabilities.

- Use a talking stick (or any designated object) to encourage one voice at a time, particularly if your group tends to get loud during group discussion or some people tend to dominate conversations. Use quiet areas for small groups. An active and interactive classroom may become overwhelming for some youth.
- Pair symbolic language with concrete terms. If you are using symbolic words or phrases throughout a lesson, post them with definitions.
- Post an agenda and go over it; prepare for transitions by giving a countdown (you have five minutes, you have three minutes, etc.); use a partner to help with transitions.
- Seek the aid of a Confirmation mentor to be an additional support.

When meeting with families to navigate supports and requirements, remind parents that you aren't looking for any confidential information about their child but that you would appreciate any strategies to help their child be successful. Other people in your church may offer professional or practical help. Consider going to your church's or presbytery's disability-inclusion team.