

# Summer Inclusion Welcoming Every Family: A Summer Guide for Churches

A Resource from Hope Centre Ministries to help your church create truly inclusive summer experiences and offer vital respite.



Summer often brings a welcome change of pace, but for families navigating life with disabilities, it can also present unique challenges as routines shift and support systems become less accessible. This guide is designed to equip your church with practical, compassionate strategies to transform summer into a season of genuine belonging and refreshment for every family. Inside, you'll find actionable tips on how to adapt your programs to be more inclusive, and creative ways to offer much-needed respite to caregivers, ensuring your church can be a beacon of support and joy for all.

## 1. Start Today: Immediate Impact for This Summer

**Listen & Connect:** Reach out to families in your congregation who have members with disabilities. Ask them, "How is summer going for you? What's one small thing that would make a big difference for your family this week?" Simply listening and acknowledging their unique challenges can be incredibly powerful.

**Offer a Simple Respite Moment:** During a Sunday service or an informal church gathering, offer to supervise children for an extra 15–30 minutes, allowing parents to have a moment of quiet conversation or prayer.

**Designate a "Quiet Corner":** Identify a low-stimulation area within your church building or during an outdoor event. Equip it with a few calming items and let families know it's available for sensory breaks.

**Send a Note of Encouragement:** Have your pastoral team or care ministry send a personalized message to families, acknowledging the unique demands of summer and expressing your support.

**Train One "Buddy" for Sunday:** Train one or two enthusiastic volunteers to welcome and assist a child with disabilities during services or programs.



## 2. Creating Inclusive Summer Experiences

### Sensory-Friendly Spaces & Activities

**Designated Quiet Zones:** Set up calm areas with soft lighting, fidget toys, weighted blankets, and headphones.

**Visual Supports:** Use schedules, social stories, and picture cues to aid understanding.

**Sensory Bins/Stations:** Provide hands-on sensory alternatives for engagement.

**Adjusting Environment:** Offer lower music volume, softer lighting, or outdoor options.

### Adapting Programs & Curriculum

**Flexible Schedules:** Allow breaks and alternatives.

**Simplified Instructions:** Use concise steps and clear language.

**"Buddy" System:** Pair each child with a trained volunteer.

**Pre-Visits/Orientation:** Let families visit beforehand to ease anxiety.

**Differentiated Activities:** Provide alternative or modified activities.

### Communication & Welcome

**Pre-Registration Forms:** Include specific questions for better planning.

**Designated Contact Person:** A go-to person for family communication.

**Inclusive Language:** Use respectful and person-first terminology.

**Warm Welcome:** Train staff and volunteers in hospitality and awareness.



## 3. Offering Respite for Caregivers

### Dedicated Respite Events

**"Parents' Night Out":** Drop-off event with inclusive activities.

**"Coffee & Connect" Mornings:** Caregiver fellowship while kids are supervised.

**Respite "Pop-Ups":** Informal breaks during regular events.

### Volunteer Recruitment & Training

**Clearly Define Roles:** Outline volunteer responsibilities.

**Basic Disability Awareness Training:** Cover essentials including communication.

**Shadowing Opportunities:** Pair new volunteers with experienced ones.

**Background Checks:** Required for all children's volunteers

### Creative Respite Ideas

**"Respite Kits":** Gift bags with encouraging items.

**Meal Train/Support:** Provide meals during stressful weeks.

**"Parent Partner" Network:** Peer support system.

**Flexible Childcare During Services:** Consistent, inclusive care during worship.





## 4. Looking Ahead: Plan for Next Summer

This summer is a valuable opportunity to observe, learn, and lay the groundwork for even more robust inclusive programming next year. Use these insights to think through different ideas and build a stronger foundation.

**Observe & Learn from This Summer:** Pay close attention to the specific challenges families are facing this summer and what immediate actions proved most helpful. What activities were difficult for them to access? Where were the greatest gaps in support? Document these observations to inform future planning.

**Gather Feedback for Future Initiatives:** Before summer ends, consider conducting a brief, informal survey or holding a casual listening session with families who have members with disabilities. Ask them about their summer experiences and what types of support or inclusive activities would be most beneficial for next year.

**Brainstorm New Ideas Based on Learnings:** Convene a small group of passionate leaders and volunteers to review the observations and feedback from this summer. Use these insights to brainstorm innovative and practical ideas for new inclusive programs, respite opportunities, and support systems for the following summer.

**Identify Key Volunteers:** Begin to identify individuals in your congregation who have a heart for this ministry. These passionate volunteers will be crucial for building a more comprehensive program next year.

**Budget & Resource Allocation:** Start considering how your church can allocate specific budget and facility resources to support disability inclusion initiatives for the following summer, based on the identified needs and new ideas.

**Form a "Dream Team":** Assemble a small, dedicated group of leaders and volunteers to brainstorm and plan for a more comprehensive and impactful inclusive summer strategy for next year.



## 5. General Best Practices

**Start Small:** Begin with one or two initiatives.

**Listen to Families:** Conduct surveys or hold listening sessions.

**Celebrate Progress:** Acknowledge volunteers and families.

**Pray Consistently:** Include families in your regular prayers.



**Thank you for your commitment to creating inclusive summer experiences for every family!**

**Contact Hope Centre Ministries for more resources and support.**