

Seven Strategies for Promoting Mental Health Inclusion in the Local Church

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Seven Barriers to Church Participation for Children and Adults with Mental Illness and Their Families

- **Social isolation**
- **Anxiety**
- **Social communication**
- **Capacity for self-control**
- **Sensory processing**
- **Stigma/reluctance to self-identify**
- **Family history of mental illness**



Seven strategies for promoting mental health inclusion (TEACHER)

- **Team:** Build an inclusion team
- **Environments:** Establish welcoming ministry environments
- **Activities with high impact:** Prioritize inclusion in activities most essential to spiritual growth
- **Communicate:** Implement a church/ministry-wide communication strategy
- **Help:** Meet heartfelt needs of families outside the church
- **Education and support**
- **Responsibility:** Ministry is owned by everyone in the church



The most important step... Gaining support of senior leadership



Who needs a seat at the table?

Building an inclusion team

- Senior leadership
- Ministry directors on church-wide implementation team
- Ministry departments may have their own team
- Consider gifts, talents, passions of church members, attendees



Establish welcoming ministry environments

- Promote focus, attention.
- Help attendees prioritize most important takeaways
- Support those with difficulty processing directions.
- Sensory stimulation engaging, not overwhelming
- Supports kids in maintaining self-control



Inclusion in high-impact ministry activities

What do you MOST want people to do to grow in faith? How do we include them?

- Weekend worship?
- Small groups?
- Prayer/family devotions/serving



Communicating about mental illness

- Preach it from the pulpit!
- Use of pictures, video
- Printed materials
- E-communication
- Social media
- Online church



Help that promotes relationships...

- Casseroles
- Intercessory prayer
- Hospital visits
- Counseling
- Community
- Compassion
- Respite
- Special worship services
- Referral services
- After-school programs
- Parent advocates
- Prison ministry



Education and support

(Advancing the Kingdom through coffee and donuts)

- “Grace Groups” – individual, family, PTSD curriculums
- Fresh Hope
- Celebrate Recovery
- NAMI Family to Family, Peer to Peer
- Diagnosis-specific groups (CHADD)



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Responsibility rests with your people!

- Responding to needs
- Grabbing a mop
- Relational respite
- Business cards with respite invitations
- 1:1 discipleship
- Parent mentors
- “Ministry of presence”



Applying the Seven Strategies

- Strategies may be applied to a specific ministry department/activity
- Not all strategies are applicable to every mental health condition or area of ministry
- Some strategies will be more applicable to your church than others,



What strategies are most relevant for overcoming what barriers?

- Social isolation: Helps, communication, education/support
- Anxiety: communication, education
- Social communication: activity inclusion, education
- Capacity for self-control: Welcoming environments
- Sensory processing: Welcoming environments
- Stigma: Communication, education



Overcoming social isolation...

- Consider how church attendees with connections in the mental health community might promote connection.
- Advertise online worship services to families with mental illness in your community
- Respite care for families of kids with mental illness
- Invite someone with a mental health condition for coffee...or a kid with a mental health condition for a play date



Overcoming the anxiety barrier...

- Prepare children, adults for first visit
- Feature pictures, video of your ministry environments on your website
- Consider how your church might inadvertently make newcomers with anxiety uncomfortable
- Managing transitions between age grouped ministries
- Create a pathway for introverts



Including those who struggle with social communication...

- Promote disability awareness, address bullying
- Identify “friendly” small groups
- Opportunity to rehearse new experiences
- Alternative paths of discipleship (mentoring)
- Let kids with precocious gifts use them to serve others



Helping kids who struggle to regulate emotions and behavior...

- More friendly ministry environments
- Consider the sequence of activities? (high-energy last?)
- Supervise transition times
- Some may be better with physical activity, movement



Helping adults who struggle with executive functioning

- Good signage
- Minimize distractions
- Make next steps for spiritual growth clear
- Minimize competing demands for time, attention
- Experiences that are engaging without being overwhelming



Helping kids and adults who struggle with sensory processing...

- Sensory-friendly entrances
- Review your ministry environments (lighting, sound, use of color)
- Alternative activities for kids with sensory issues
- Monitor transition times closely



Overcoming stigma in the church...

- Talk about it on Sunday morning
- Encourage families in the church to share their stories
- Start or host a support group
- Share helpful links, articles, sermons through social media
- Value kids, adults with mental illness by serving them



Helping kids and adults reluctant to self-disclose...

- Consider interventions to help all kids, families
- Review registration materials...give parents permission to share helpful information
- Adopt procedures to protect confidential information
- Floating support in your children's, student ministries
- Identify an inclusion advocate



Including kids when parents have mental health conditions

- Parents of kids who are inconsistent attenders?
- They may need more reminders to come
- Watch for folks who haven't attended for some time
- Community helps with accountability



Some guiding principles for mental health inclusion at church...

- A mindset...not a program
- Helping kids, families join what you already do
- **REMEMBER:** No church can welcome every family impacted by mental illness, but every church can welcome more families with mental illness!



Takeaways:

- Support of senior leadership is foundational for an effective mental health inclusion initiative.
- The model doesn't require the establishment of programs that will compete for resources with other ministry initiatives.
- Start by prioritizing inclusion in ministry activities most important for spiritual growth.
- Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good.
- Do something!



Taking the next step...

Explore seven strategies for promoting mental health inclusion.

Join an ongoing group of colleagues seeking to promote mental health outreach and inclusion.

Connect with OutsideIn Ministries and Key Ministry



What Does Key Ministry Do?

Key Ministry promotes meaningful connection between churches and families of kids with disabilities for the purpose of making disciples of Jesus Christ.

Free training, consultation, support and resources



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Stay in Touch!

Key Ministry Website: <http://www.keyministry.org>

E-mail: steve@keyministry.org

Church4EveryChild...Key Ministry Blog: <http://www.church4everychild.org>



<https://www.facebook.com/keyministry/>
<https://www.facebook.com/NotAloneParents/>



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