



# Ministry with Neurodivergent Families

# Agenda

- Understand neurodivergence and family needs
- Learn steps to launch a ministry
- Explore best practices
- Equip leaders and volunteers
- Build a sustainable, loving ministry



# What is Neurodiversity?

- ♦ Natural variation in human brains
- ♦ Includes Autism, ADHD, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Tourette's, SPD, etc.
- ♦ Not pathology — part of God's creation



# Theology

Imago Dei: every person bears God's image

1 Corinthians 12: The body needs all members

Inclusion = discipleship, not charity

# Why families need support

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Overstimulation in worship

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Fear of judgment

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Inconsistent participation

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Lack of safe childcare

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Difficulty finding inclusive faith  
communities

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# Common Barriers



Loud music



Complex liturgy



No quiet spaces



“Behavior expectations” misunderstand stimming or movement



Lack of training for volunteers

# Getting Started

Form your core team

Conduct Audit

Listen to families

Start small

Launch



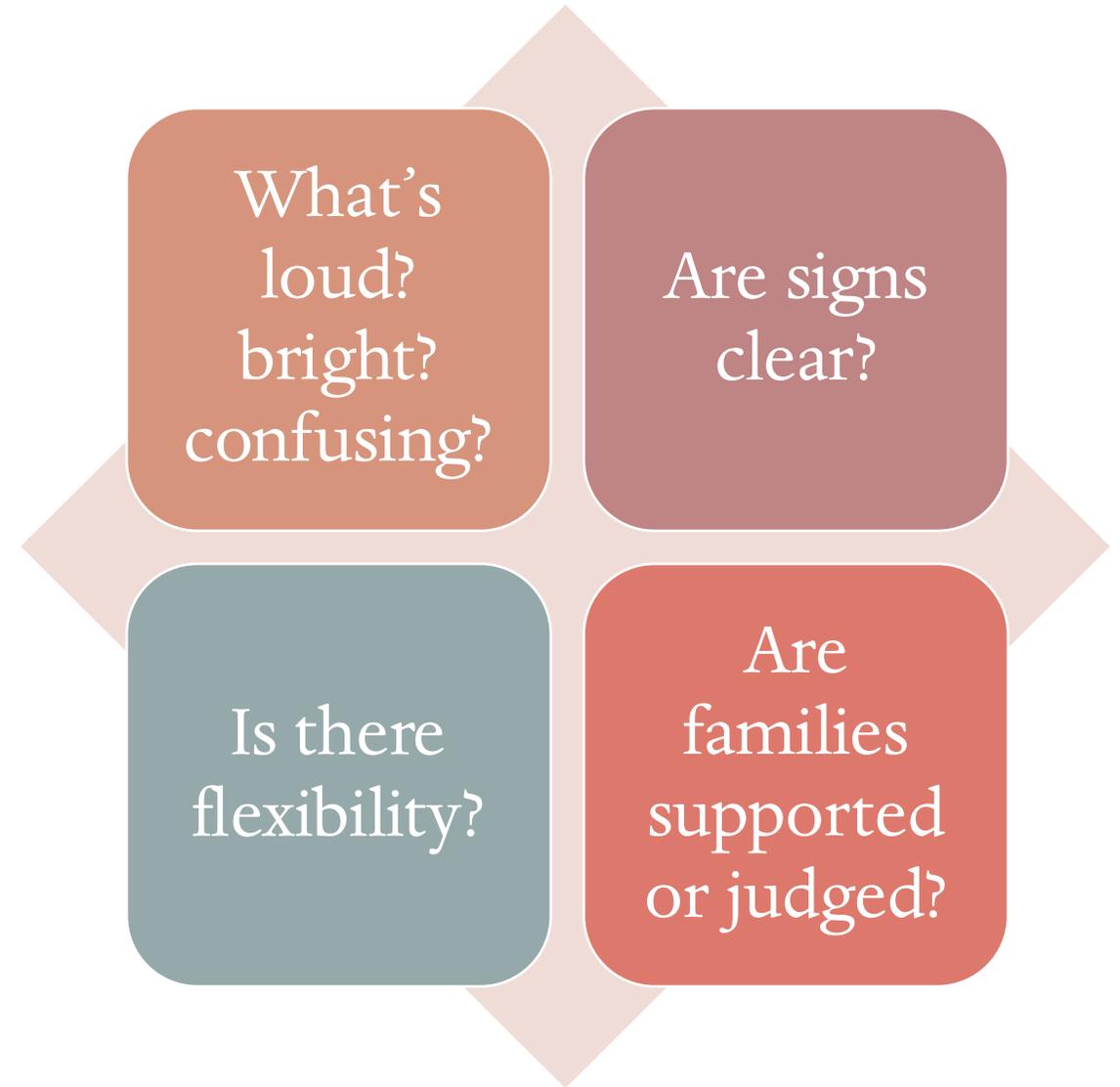


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# Form your core team

- ♦ Suggested members:
  - ♦ Pastor or staff lead
  - ♦ Neurodivergent adults
  - ♦ Parents/ caregivers
  - ♦ Children's/ youth ministry leaders
  - ♦ Educators or therapists
  - ♦ 5–8 people total

# Conduct a sensory and culture audit

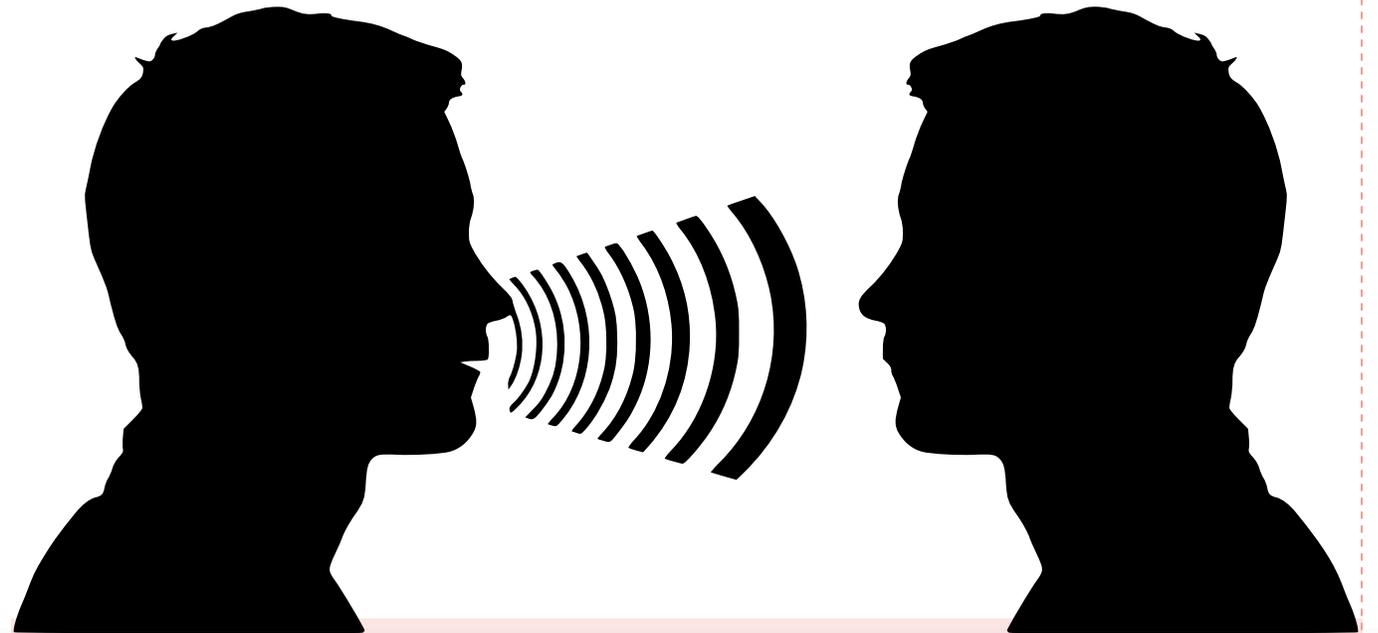


# Listen to families

- ♦ Use surveys or listening circles

Ask:

- ♦ What helps your child?
- ♦ What's hard about church?
- ♦ What supports do you already use?
- ♦ What would make worship easier?



## First steps: Start small

Sensory pew

Quiet room

Visual order of worship

Noise-canceling headphones

Flexible seating

# Launch a Pilot Program

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Sensory-friendly service

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Buddy system

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Parent support group

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Adaptive Sunday School  
Choose **one** to begin.

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# Other Best Practices

- Train Volunteers
  - Best Practices for worship
  - Sensory Room
  - Communication Tools
  - Buddy Ministry
  - Parent/Caregiver Support
  - Church-Wide Culture shift
  - Communicate Publicly
  - Evaluate after 3-6 months
  - Expand Ministry
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# Train Volunteers

- ♦ Neurodiversity 101
- ♦ Sensory needs
- ♦ Communication approaches
- ♦ De-escalation
- ♦ Hospitality and dignity



# Best Practices for worship

Predictable structure

Clear verbal and visual cues

Acceptance of noise and movement

Shorter elements

Flexible seating

# Sensory Room



Must be:



Calm lighting



Soft seating



Not punitive



Accessible anytime



Stocked with sensory tools





# Communication Tools

- ♦ Visual schedules
- ♦ Social stories
- ♦ Pictogram bulletins
- ♦ Color-coded areas
- ♦ Sensory map of the building



## Buddy Ministry

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Trained volunteer per child

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Helps with transitions

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Supports safety

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Offers consistency

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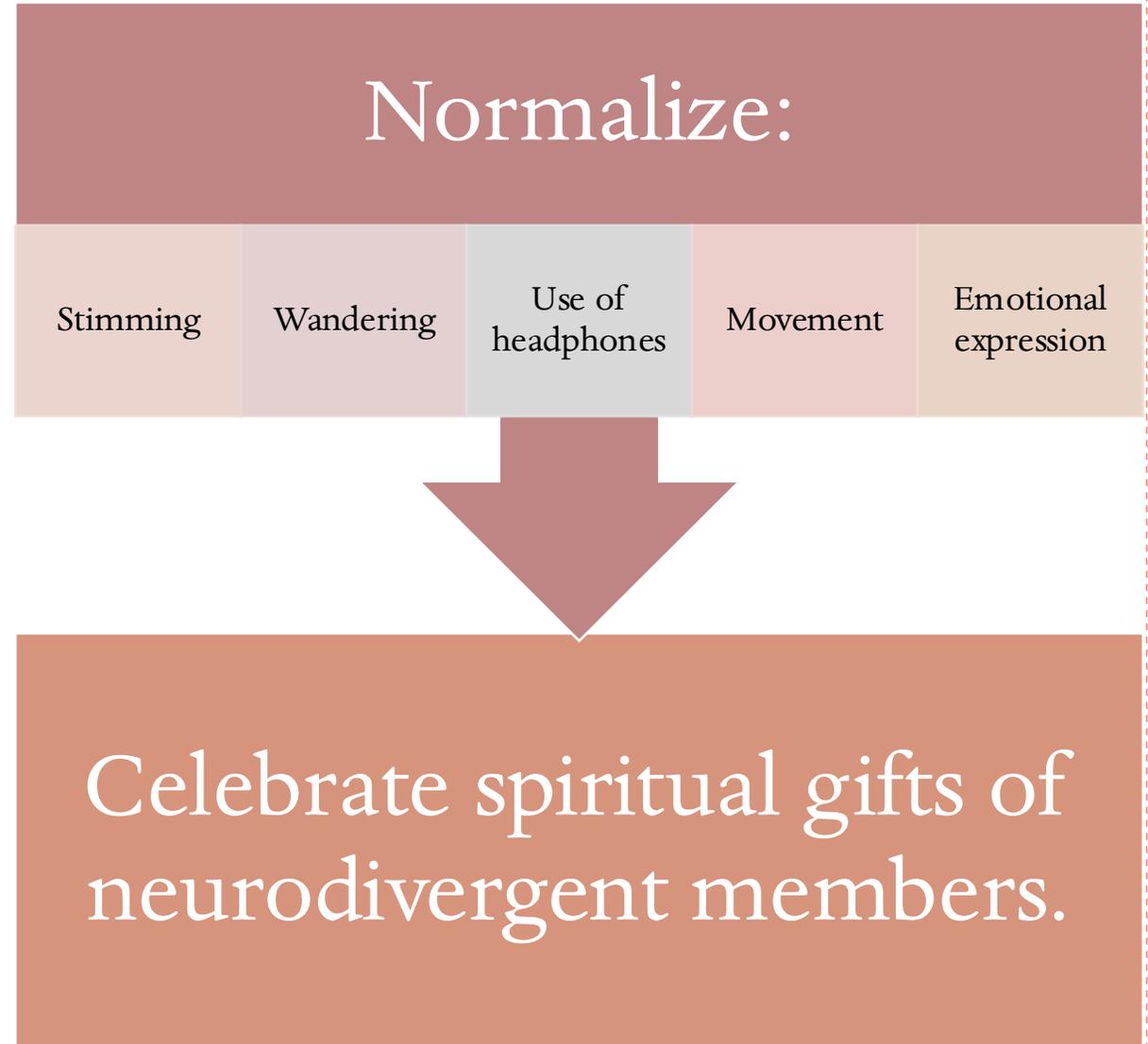
Frees parents to worship

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# Parent / Caregiver support

- ♦ Provide:
  - ♦ Monthly gathering
  - ♦ Peer support
  - ♦ Prayer & encouragement
  - ♦ Resource sharing
  - ♦ Childcare if possible

# Church wide cultural shift



# Communicate Publicly

Website accessibility page

Bulletin announcements

Clear signage

Personal invitations

“Movement, noise, and stimming are welcome here.”

Evaluate after 3-6  
months

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What's working?

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What's overwhelming?

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What needs funding or  
support?

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What should we add next?

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# Expand ministries

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Respite nights

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Adaptive VBS

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Neurodivergent young adult groups

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Training for whole congregation

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Partnerships with local schools

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Questions?