

Disability Sunday activities for Sunday Schools and Youth Groups:

These activities are designed to help young people empathise with their disabled friends, and understand a bit more of what life is like for them. After each activity, time should be allowed to let people feed back to the group (a) how they felt in the role of a disabled person, (b) what new insights they gained from the exercise and (c) what might help to make things easier for the disabled person.

1. Divide the group into pairs. In each pair, 1 should be seated and 1 standing. The person standing should go behind the chair and talk to the person in the chair. Then they should come and stand in front of the chair and talk to the seated person from there. Finally, they should drop down onto one knee and continue the conversation. Then let the pair swap places and repeat the exercise. How might it feel to be a person in a wheelchair trying to carry on a conversation with a person who can walk?
2. Explain to the group that people with autism notice everything in a room, and it can be hard for them to focus on just one thing. All the impressions that most of us ignore when we're concentrating on something come at them with equal force, and make it hard for them to know what they're meant to be concentrating on. Get one person to sit down, and another to stand in front of them and describe what (s)he did last Saturday. While this is happening, have another person stand next to the seated person ruffling their hair all the time. Have another person stand on the other side of them, reading loudly from the Bible. Another person should stand behind them with a drum or other percussion instrument, making as loud a sound as possible. Someone else should stand beside the person who is describing their Saturday, and jump up and down the whole time. Meanwhile another person should keep flashing a torch on and off in front of the seated person, and another person should repeatedly prod them in the back (not hard enough to hurt, obviously!) If you wish, another person could squirt some perfume or air freshener into the air. Now ask the

seated person what they learned about what the speaker did the previous Saturday. How difficult might it be for a child or young person with an autism spectrum condition to participate in your group's activities?

3. Get the young people into pairs, then randomly rearrange the furniture in the room so that the chairs, tables, and even people's coats and bags, form obstacles all over the floor. Get one person from each pair to close their eyes and hold onto the other person's elbow. Then get the other person to guide them all around the room, avoiding the obstacles. Let them swap roles. How difficult was it to trust the other person? Were they tempted to open their eyes at any point? Was the person guiding tempted to push the other person along in front?
4. Copy a song or hymn your church regularly uses into a word document and use a data projector to project it onto a screen. Make the font no bigger than 14 and ensure that the image is really out of focus and fuzzy so that it can't be read. Play a note on an instrument, and ask the young people to sing the song on the screen, beginning on that note. How does it feel to be a visually impaired person in a church where all the song words are on projector screens?
5. Divide the group into pairs. Get one of each pair to describe to the other what they had for breakfast without actually saying the words out loud. The other should try to work out from the pattern of their lips what they were saying. Let them swap roles and repeat the exercise. Then get one of them to say the following sentences, again, just by making the pattern of the words with their lips and not actually saying the words aloud. At the end of each sentence, the lip reader should try to say what the sentence was:
 - (i) There were monkeys in the first cage
 - (ii) There was an aviary with some parrots
 - (iii) Next came the tiger enclosure
 - (iv) The giraffes were eating the highest leaves
 - (v) There was a red panda in one of the trees

Now tell the lip-reader (aloud) that you are describing what you saw on a visit to the zoo, and repeat the exercise, lip-speaking each sentence without saying it aloud. Now that the lip-reader knows what the topic is, does (s)he find it any easier to guess what you are trying to say? Swap places, and repeat the exercise with the following sentences:

- (i) There was a blue car parked in the road
- (ii) The car in front of us was going really slowly
- (iii) My dad overtook the red car
- (iv) There was an articulated lorry
- (v) I wanted my dad to drive faster

Once again, reveal at the end that the topic is about traffic on the road, and repeat the exercise, to see if this information makes it any easier or the lip reader to understand what is being said.

6. If you have someone in the church who speaks a language not known to most of the young people, invite them to come into the group and, in this language, tell the young people all about their life. At the end, ask the children questions such as, Where was this person born? At what age did (s)he leave school? What job does (s)he do? How many siblings does (s)he have? When did (s)he come to live in the UK? When they can't answer the questions, tell them they are not trying hard enough, or that they are being lazy. This is a bit what life is like, especially in school, for people with learning disabilities. They often don't understand what is going on, and frequently people don't take the trouble to explain it to them in words they can understand.
7. Choose a discussion topic. This could be absolutely anything that might be of interest to the young people. Brief 2 young people in advance. Explain to them that you want them to keep raising a hand and trying to participate in the discussion, but that you are not going to let them take part. Nevertheless they should keep trying. The rest of the discussion participants must not know about this. Every time one of these 2 people tries to take part in the discussion, say something like, "Put your hand down." Or, "No, not you." Or, "No one wants to hear what you've got to say." Or, "Will you just butt out, we're not interested in your opinion," etc.

The rest of the group will be increasingly astonished at your behaviour! At the end, explain to the group that many disabled people are never given the chance to voice their opinion or say what they want out of life, and when they do try to put their views forward, they are often ignored. Get the 2 people to say how it felt not to have a voice.



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