



Suggestions for Creating Accessible Services

Ideas big and small for Shabbat services and school *tefillah*



- Have a large flip chart or large flip cards that someone updates throughout the service, with the prayer names and page numbers in an easily-seen location (like the front of the sanctuary) during services, and a person, or project the prayer name and page number electronically on a screen at the front of the prayer-space (if it is not Shabbat or if electricity use is not a problem).
 - Alternatively, consider having the entire prayer on the card or projection—as long as it will still be legible.
- “Create an ‘atmosphere of barriers’ during a portion of worship services: turn the lights down so it is difficult to follow along in the prayer book, turn off the microphones, speak in sentences that are missing every two words, create distractions. This will give people an idea of what it might be like to not have access to the written and spoken words, to have a learning disability and to have an attention disorder.” (Shelly Christensen, *Jewish Community Guide to Inclusion of People with Disabilities*, 83)
 - Discuss the experience in services, in lieu of a sermon, or as a group or in individual classrooms after services.
- Have an inclusion-focused Shabbat, in which the rabbi speaks about inclusion in the Torah, and guest speaker/speakers give congregants “a true understanding of living with a disability.” (*Guide*, 84)
- Use charades to tell stories and explain parts of the service, acting out different activities mentioned.
- Give short explanations for different parts of the *siddur*.
- Have a welcoming beginning to services. Emphasize that every person be greeted by ushers or greeters, who introduce themselves and ask the names of people they don’t know, and who make sure everyone has someone to sit with, a comfortable seat, and a good view of the *bimah*.
 - Begin services with the congregation pairing off with people they don’t know, asking get-to-know you questions (e.g., what brings you here today? What relationship do

you have with Shabbat? What is one good experience this week you want to bring into Shabbat? What is one experience you want to leave behind in this week?).

- If the congregation is small enough, have every person introduce their partner, and share one thing about that person, with his/her permission. Use this as an introduction to the idea of building holy, inclusive community.
- Use one of the stories found in [Jewish Stories & Tales on Inclusion](#).
- Use a selection from [Prayers on Special Needs](#).
- Invite students, *madrichim*/teenagers/community members with disabilities to act out one of the stories above, or Moses' story found on page 236 of the *Jewish Community Guide to Inclusion of People with Disabilities*.
- Ask or hire an American Sign Language interpreter to sign services.
- Sandy Miller-Jacobs sent an example of an inclusion Shabbat service:
 - “We ran a Shabbat service once a month for a few years, based on the Ramah Tikvah model. It was short and simple. We created a siddur, had visual cues for each part of the service, and gave out parts (opening the ark, holding the Torah, etc.). The rabbi had a d'var that was on the level of the participants with props or pictures and asked questions that the participants answered. During the service he would sometimes play charades - acting out things like putting up a mezzuzah, pouring wine for kiddush, lighting Shabbat candles. The service had a lot of singing and short explanations. At the end of the service the entire congregation joined Minyan Me'YOUchad for kiddush.”