

# Building a Disability Ministry that Lasts...

## 5 Steps to Getting Started



### 1. Ask and Listen

When beginning a ministry, you need to know who you're serving and how they define their needs! Don't make assumptions about what people need, and don't ignore people already in your congregation. Start by meeting the needs of people already in your church, you will grow in your capacity to serve those who will come in the future. While this is step one, it's something we need to return to often. Needs change and adapt with time. Periodic adjustments and tune-ups will keep your ministry healthy and vibrant as those in your ministry move from childhood, to their teen years, to adult life.

### 2. Set Goals

Your ministry needs to know what it's trying to accomplish. Ministries can grow and adapt, but if you don't know where you're going, you'll never get there! A mission statement will help guide choices. And the good news is, your church probably already has a mission statement. For example, if your church mission statement says, "To be a place where *everyone* can know Jesus, connect with others, and serve our community," how do people with disabilities fit into that mission? The simple answer is, they're part of "everyone!" If you tie your disability ministry's mission statement to the mission of the church, it becomes part of your church's DNA.

### 3. Define Leadership Roles

The long-term health of your ministry depends on having a ministry structure that can scale to the size of your ministry. Regardless of your ministry's focus or purpose, there are three roles that need to be filled. While a small ministry may have one person filling these roles, a growing ministry will need to delegate these responsibilities to a team.

#### Leadership Liaison

This person has access to church staff and leadership, providing a bridge for open communication.

#### Volunteer Liaison

Training, encouraging, and scheduling volunteers is key to any ministry, but particularly in disability ministry where relationships are critical and trust is built over time.

#### Family Liaison

Disability ministry is constantly evolving and changing in response to the needs of the families being served. This person builds relationships to understand the needs of new families and the changing needs of existing families as they move through different phases of life. Current family information is updated in the Family Ministry Profile.

#### 4. Recruiting Volunteers

Disability ministry can sound like the realm of medical professionals and trained, special-ed teachers. But, “not an expert,” does not mean “unqualified.” While experts provide helpful guidance and insights, disability ministry is a *ministry*. Godly character and gifting are the most important qualifications.

##### Who to Recruit

Character counts far more than experience or expertise! You don't need *just* experts, but you also don't need *just* anyone! You want volunteers who can grow in their God-given gifting. Be cautious about recruiting parents or siblings of someone affected by a disability. While they may have experience and a willingness to help, offering respite to families affected by special needs may be more valuable.

##### How to Recruit

Connecting someone's gifts and character with disability ministry helps people see how they are *already* qualified to serve. Consider the power of saying, “I see the way you are patient and kind and always remember details about people's lives. Those are qualities we need in our disability ministry.” Be intentional in your conversations with those you want to serve with you.

##### What to Ask

Define the volunteer role, frequency of service, time commitment, training provided, and leadership structure. Clearly defined expectations and commitments will be a blessing to everyone involved!

#### 5. Prepare Your Church

Volunteers are not the only ones who need training! A truly accessible church involves everyone in the church family. A church culture that values, welcomes, and accepts people of all abilities is a church that reflects the heart of Christ.

##### Disability Awareness

The first step toward an accessible, welcoming church culture is understanding the realities of life with a disability. Familiarity builds empathy for the struggles of those with disabilities, while at the same time reveals what we all share: a need for love, acceptance, and most of all a saving faith in Jesus!

##### Disability Etiquette

Fear of doing or saying the wrong thing can often keep people from comfortably engaging people with disabilities. A basic training on appropriate terminology and etiquette will empower your church family to confidently welcome and embrace people with disabilities.