

Your Neighbour: Special Considerations for Disabled Members of the Community

At Livability, we aim to help churches create communities where everyone is included. But as we respond to coronavirus, how can this be achieved with those who are disabled? With churches asking what they can do to offer the most effective help, we offer some principles to operate by and some ideas to put into action when considering those who might need particular help in our community.

Key Principles

- **Recognise that each experience of disability is unique.** The broad term disability can cover many experiences and impairments which change the way that people uniquely interact with the world. It's important to remember that we shouldn't make assumptions about what people need, even at a time like this. Taking time to understand what's required offers respect for the uniqueness of each person- regardless of what seems apparent on the surface.
- **Communication may need extra effort.** It may be reasonable to assume that many people have received the message that help is available- but if your communication channels are limited due to disability, this may not be the case. For some, social media may be inaccessible. Use the eyes, hands and feet of trusted neighbours- and put a call out asking that they specifically pass on the information of your offer.
- **Take social distancing very seriously.** Some may be living with conditions which place them in a highly vulnerable grouping. Precautions on distance contact and disinfecting will need to take priority. Always check in and comply with Public Health guidance on this.
- **Do your research.** Before you begin reaching out to neighbours: make contact with other local organisations such as your local COVID 19 group and networks offering support. Local Mencap or MIND groups, or Alzheimer's and MS Society groups often provide good points of contact for advice for those impacted by specific conditions. Work together and avoid duplication of services where possible - can your church family contribute to an existing food bank or support with 'Check In and Chat' services that have already been set up?
- **Consider your best gift as a community.** It may be that is practical help- but if your local COVID 19 group is already well resourced- think carefully as to whether your best support may be friendship or pastoral support. A note to say 'we're praying for this area- we'd love to pray for you or with you on the phone,



or just chat- you choose' may be welcome. Whatever you decide, be clear about why you are getting in touch with people. An offer of connection may be particularly meaningful in a time of increasing social isolation.

- **Consider carers.** At a time like this support to carers may be missed. Respite opportunities are reduced, day centres are limited, services disrupted. What can you do to encourage or support somebody in this position? Remember that the needs may be opposite to the people who are receiving the care. There may be local carer support groups whose details may be available through your local GP.
- **Ask what might be helpful.** As well as making specific offers of support, you might not have thought of something very simple that could make a big difference in a person's life, so ask! It may also be helpful to know other networks they are part of. Note: you may not be able to offer the support a person is asking for (for example a home safety check, which can be offered by the local Fire & Rescue service) but you may be able to find a local organisation that can help.

Just a thought: as you introduce yourself to your neighbours, consider equally that with the right support a disabled person may be able to contribute to church family life as much as they are a recipient of help. First things first though, let a person know you are glad they are your neighbour and take it from there.

Some practical tips

- If you are dropping a note through someone's door, introduce yourself clearly and simply, avoiding church jargon - include a photo if possible, and all the better if it includes a picture of smiling faces. Be clear on what you are offering. Ensure the font is clear and readable (point 14 size minimum).
- Make it possible for people to respond to the invitation - include a phone number / contact details, with a named individual where possible. It's far less daunting to call a named individual than 'The Church Office'
- Follow up how you say you will - if you say you will pop by, pop by!
- Be aware of the possible need to invite someone to participate on a week by week basis. If a person is not able to initiate relationship but they show an interest in being included then do ask again.
- Think about how you will record the offers and invitations you are making to people, and at what point will you review this? An initiative should always be shaped by how people identify they would most value support.



- Consider: are there any safeguarding considerations? Who will you discuss these with?

Thank you for all you are doing to help our communities feel connected and cared for.

Corin Pilling
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Livability is a disability charity that's committed to enabling people to live the life they want to lead. We have services across the UK in the South East, South West, East Anglia, Northern Ireland, Wales, North East & Northants

For more information visit www.livability.org.uk

