

# Neurodiverse Discipleship Groups

Tips for including neurodiverse people in your discipleship groups

## Introduction

This resource is intended to assist Corp leaders and discipleship group leaders in effectively discipling neurodiverse people in your local mission expression.

Neurodiversity was first associated in relation to people with autism. It is now more widely used to acknowledge the diversity in brain functioning associated with a range of developmental conditions and experiences. These can include autism, intellectual disability, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, foetal alcohol spectrum disorder and early life adversity.

## Inclusion Tips

### 1. Provide a safe environment

Ensure that the environment is easily accessible, and participants feel secure and safe to express their understanding and opinions in group discussions. Each participant must also be given the freedom to choose to not participate if they do not want to do so. It is important to build a culture of trust and encouragement for peer-to-peer engagement. Plan break times for participants during the lesson to relax and destress. If appropriate, provide a safe and comfortable place with sensory materials for participants to retrieve when needed.

### 2. One key concept

Present each lesson in a simple and concrete way. Keep to one key concept for the participants-this can be a visual or a keyword that sums up the theme of the session. Try to avoid introducing too many new concepts at once. One study group found it helpful to ask the participants the question "What is my takeaway?" or "In a nutshell..." summaries of what they had learned from the session.

### 3. Make it practical

Encourage participants to think about and take note of one action step or application from this lesson that they can apply in their lives. Support participants when needed to relate the lesson on a personal level with themselves, friends and family. A great question that one group asks is: How will I be different today because of what we have learned?



#### 4. Explore the Bible in different ways

As some participants may not feel confident reading, it is best to avoid group reading where each person is allocated a verse or verses to read out loud. Alternatively, the group can explore other ways of learning God's Word such as one confident reader can read the verses out loud, then another person can 'tell it in their own words' to the group. This opportunity also allows to clarify comprehension and understanding. If applicable, the verses can be acted out, drawn, or played on audio Bible. Additionally, there are a variety of online video resources that are great for visual Bible studies such as the Bible Project.



#### 5. Consider different learning and worship styles

Be aware and provide engaging learning and worship opportunities for participants with different communication and worship styles. Ask participants, "how do YOU learn best?" Often it may be obvious what strategies suit individuals, but it empowers the participants to engage them in what they think. Different learning styles include: visual, auditory, tactile and experimental. It may be difficult to incorporate these different learning styles into one lesson. If this is the case, if one lesson is focused on visual and auditory, ensure that another lesson would incorporate tactile and experimental learning opportunities. Similarly, explore other options of inclusive worship which could include art, dance, and music. By providing motivating and engaging lessons and opportunities for worship it will inspire participants.

#### 6. Consistency

Some participants may benefit from a consistent routine and schedule for the discipleship group. This consistency provides a sense of security in knowing what to expect each time. An example of this could be: welcome, ice breaker game, Bible study, short break, discussion/activity, prayer and relaxed social time. A visual schedule or written 'lesson agenda' can help to support what is coming up next in the lesson.

#### 7. Prayer

It is important that in each lesson participants are given the opportunity to pray. Encourage participants to be prayed for as well as pray for others. Create a culture where people feel free to pray what is on their heart to pray-whether that be many words or just one. Concentrate on the focus being about connecting with the Lord and that may be done in various ways.

## 8. Leadership development

Create opportunities for leadership development for people of all abilities. This can be done by giving opportunities for participants to take turns in leading a section. For example, ask if they would lead an icebreaker question or the time to say grace over dinner and continue to add responsibility after time. Provide relevant support and mentoring to assist them in developing leadership skills.

## 9. Engage and empower

Take opportunity to engage participants directly about how to best support them and create inspiring lessons that are relevant to their learning styles. The question, "How can we support you?" is a simple but powerful question. Regularly seeking feedback is also important asking participants "What do you think we should keep the same, what should we change?"

## Resource Acknowledgement

This resource was developed in collaboration with Auxiliary Lieutenant Karen Clark from the Caloundra Corps.

## Resource Feedback

Please send your feedback on how you found this resource and any suggested improvements to [disabilityinclusion@salvationarmy.org.au](mailto:disabilityinclusion@salvationarmy.org.au)