

Disability and Spirituality

2012 Autism Institute – Kentucky Autism Training Center

Melinda Jones Ault, Ph.D.

Penina Goldstein, B.A.

AAIDD (2010) Position Statement on Spirituality

People with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities* have the right to choose their own expressions of spirituality, to practice those beliefs and expressions and to participate in the faith community of their choice or other spiritual activities. They also have a right to choose not to participate in religious or spiritual activity.

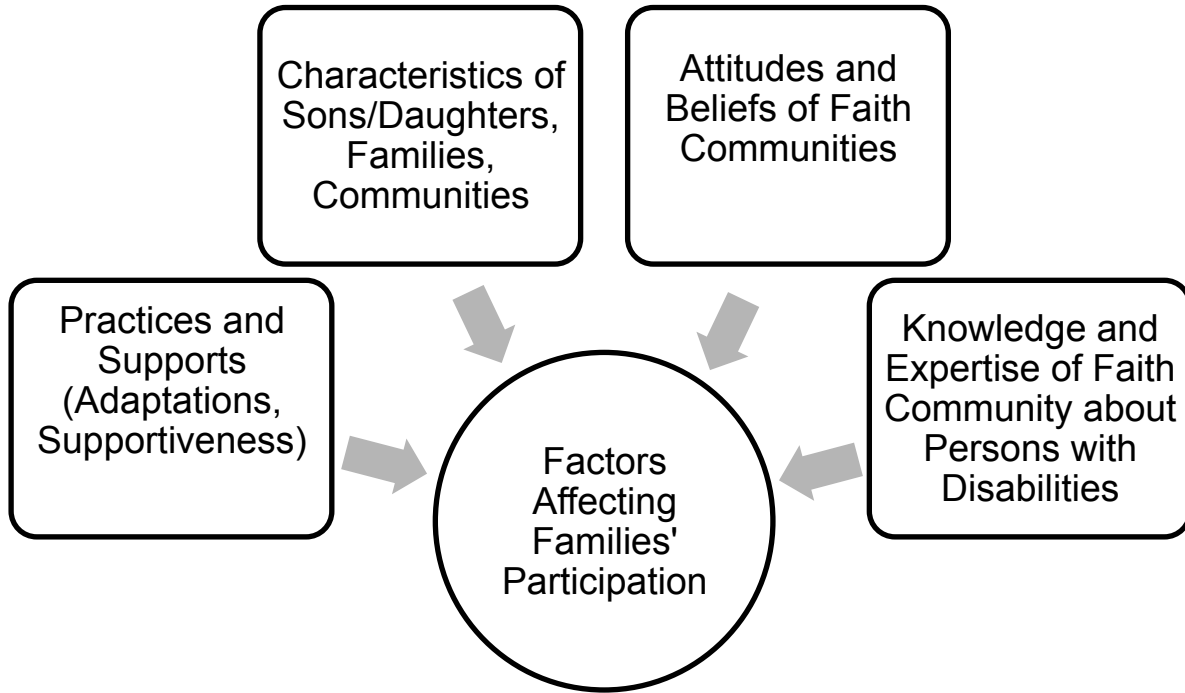
http://www.aamr.org/content_155.cfm

Findings from: Ault, M. J., Collins, B. C., & Carter, E. W (in press). Congregational participation and supports for children and adults with disabilities: Parent perceptions. *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*.

Question	Parent response
Have you ever changed your place of worship because your child was not included or welcomed?	32%
Have you ever refrained from participating in a religious activity because your child was not included?	47%
Have you ever kept your child from participating in a religious activity because support was not provided?	56%
Have you ever been asked to stay with your child at a religious activity so your child could participate?	55%
Have you ever been asked the best way to include your child?	54%

- Parents rated a welcoming attitude toward people with disabilities as helpful (91.5%), followed by the provision of additional support to participate in regular activities (67.3%), parent support groups (48.1%), accessible materials (46.3%), and accessible facilities (46.3%).
- Only 42.5% of parents described their congregations as *supportive*, 41.1% described their congregations as *sometimes supportive*, and 12.7% indicated they were *not supportive*.
- Parents who had sons or daughters with ASD were more likely than parents of sons or daughters with mild or severe intellectual disabilities to feel less supported in their faith community.

Findings from: Ault, M. J., Collins, B. C., & Carter, E. W. (2012). *Factors affecting participation in faith communities for families of sons or daughters with disabilities*. Manuscript submitted for publication.



Advice from Parents for Facilitating the Inclusion of Their Sons/Daughters with Disabilities into Faith Communities

Advice for Other Parents	Advice for Faith Communities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accompany the child for a little while until volunteers feel comfortable with child’s needs • Tell others it’s OK to ask questions about the child • Ask for disability awareness for the community • Parents should reach out to other parents • Take children to place of worship regularly so they become part of community • Be persistent • Tell the place of worship this is what the child needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a quiet area/calming place or activity area in case child want to leave worship and parents want to stay • Have a philosophy of open doors/open hearts to everyone • Teach tolerance and awareness to the community • Involve people with disabilities in the community as servers, etc. • Ask the parents how the community can include and meet their needs • Talk to the person with disabilities • Help similar families make connections with each other

Advice for Other Parents	Advice for Faith Communities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't assume there will be problems • Have extra support for the child (extra adult, peer buddy) • Be patient • Recognize when the community is making an effort and be reasonable • Don't be afraid to ensure child has access • Go in offering to volunteer in the place of worship but ask that your child be supervised so you can do so • Communicate with everyone involved before child is included • Get religious lessons ahead of time and prepare your child • Take advantage of services that might be offered • Lobby strongly for need of program • Recognize that continual adjustments will need to be made 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reach out to the families and children, don't wait for them to initiate • Have a philosophy of inclusion of all people in all events • Have ongoing training for volunteers and staff • Provide short-term and long-term support • Problem solve with parents to arrive at agreeable solutions for everyone • Build a volunteer base • Remember that parents have added stresses and pressures • Have books/resources on disabilities available • Have physically accessible facilities • Rejoice in the birth of a child with disabilities and offer assistance to family • Offer alternatives to traditional worship services

Resources

Books & Monographs

Bolduc, K. D. (2001). *Autism & alleluias*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press.

Carter, E. W. (2007). *Including people with disabilities in faith communities: A guide for service providers, families, and congregations*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes.

Christensen, S. (2007). *The Jewish guide to inclusion of people with disabilities*. Minneapolis, MN: Jewish Family and Children's Services.

Pinsky, M. I. (2012). *Amazing gifts: Stories of faith, disability, and inclusion*. Herndon, VA: Alban.

Walsh, M. B., Walsh, A. F., & Gaventa, W. C. (2008). *Autism and faith: A Journey into community*. Ewing, NJ: COSAC. Retrieved from <http://rwjms.umdnj.edu/boggscenter/products/documents/AutismandFaith.pdf>

Articles

Ali, D. D. (2012). *Finding common ground across special needs: Ritual, autism, and my faith*. Retrieved from <http://www.parliamentofreligions.org/news/index.php/2012/04/finding-common-ground-across-special-needs-ritual-autism-and-my-faith/#.T5lv09LQw-8.email>

Ault, M. J., Collins, B. C., & Carter, E. W. (in press). Congregational participation and supports for children and adults with disabilities: Parent perceptions. *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*.

Collins, B. C., & Ault, M. J. (2010). Including persons with disabilities in the religious community: Program models implemented by two churches. *Journal of Religion, Disability, & Health*, 14, 113-131. doi:10.1080/15228961003622195

Forest, & Pearpoint, J. (1997). *Four easy questions*. Retrieved from www.fsrcdane.net/library/docs/FourQues.doc

Websites

1. <http://www.adnetonline.org>
The Anabaptist Disability Network works to support families of people with disabilities while giving churches the necessary resources to promote inclusion in their congregations.
2. www.pcusa.org/phewa
The Presbyterian Health Education and Welfare Association works to support social justice ministries within the church, including the Presbyterians for Disability Concerns ministry.
3. www.joniandfriends.org
Joni and Friends is a global outreach center that works with ministries worldwide to find ways for people with disabilities and their families to participate in the Christian faith.
4. www.blhs.org
Bethesda Lutheran Communities works with Lutheran churches to reach out to members of the church with intellectual and developmental disabilities.
5. www.ncpd.org
The National Catholic Partnership on Disability work to involve people with disabilities in all aspects of church life through a broad range of ministries and resources.
6. <http://www.nafim.org/>
The National Apostolic for Inclusion Ministry supports the full inclusion of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in the Catholic Church.
7. <http://www.jgateways.org/>
Gateways is a Jewish organization based in Boston that works toward making Jewish education accessible for students with disabilities.
8. <http://www.jsped.org/>
The Jewish Special Education International Consortium works to provide services to both children and adults with special needs in Jewish communities across the United States and Canada.
9. <http://www.smilecan.org/about>
SMILE is an organization working to support Muslim children with disabilities and their families in Canada.