

Place of Worship



Religious worship is an important part of the lives of many families. Although religious practices are unique to each person, many families with autism share similar challenges as they participate in religious services. In this type of environment, difficult behaviors related to autism can be trying on many levels.

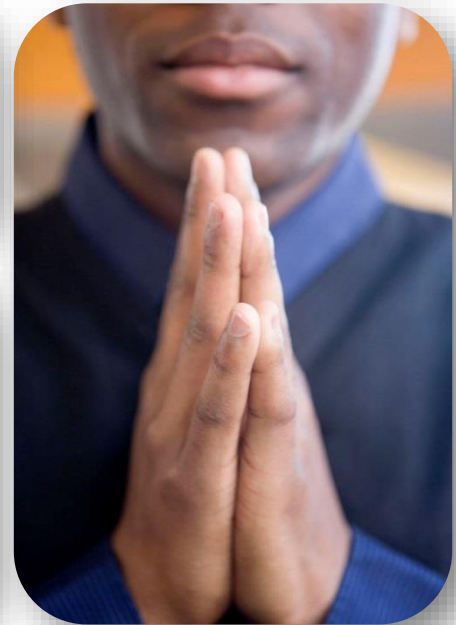
A few helpful strategies can help provide some focus for a person with autism and at the same time teach various aspects of faith and religious practice. Practicing these strategies at home, first, may help with preparation while strengthening the family through this shared experience.

At Home:

- Explain important symbols and fundamentals of your faith by using pictures books or story boards. These teaching tools can be used to tell stories about the faith and the meaning of holidays, traditions, and ceremonies.
- Say basic prayers with the individual every day. Make a prayer book with simple wording and pictures to help learn the prayers.
- Watch videos and sing songs associated with your faith.
- Take pictures of key people, objects, important parts of the service, seating, alters, etc. and label. You can make a picture book or use as flash cards.
- With the permission of the facility, create a video that illustrates a religious practice or service to show what happens and what people do. If video is not possible, use pictures to create a social story.

Places of Worship:

- Contact the leader or director of your place of worship. Meet with him or her to discuss concerns and interests. Ask if there are other congregants with autism. If there are others, consider reaching out to them or forming a faith-based support group. Provide information and resources as needed.
- Reach out to your director of religious education to obtain home-based learning materials and discuss ways to foster inclusion within the religious school programs.
- To build familiarity, set up a time to visit, explore, meet, and greet with the service leader. Bring the picture book or flash cards and create an interactive activity. Show the picture to the person, have them repeat the name, and identify the location. Reward when identified correctly.
- To help foster relationships, try to develop a peer partnership with a neighbor or fellow congregant who can help focus and encourage participation.
- Locate the bathrooms, exits, and “escape routes” ahead of time.
- Find something enjoyable to engage the person. If comfortable, the person can greet people, distribute prayer or song books, or collect them at the end of the service.
- Be prepared to distract if necessary. Quiet, appropriate objects such as books can serve as distractions.
- It may be necessary to take breaks during the service. Encourage the use of a signal to indicate the need for a break.
- When necessary, find a quiet area that may have a speaker system so that you can listen to the service without disruption to others.



KOHL'S
Cares 

Through a partnership with Kohl's Cares, Children's Specialized Hospital is improving access to care for children with special healthcare needs.

RWJBarnabas
HEALTH

Children's
Specialized
Hospital 



RWJBH.org/CSH