

# Why Faith Participation is Difficult for Persons with Mental Illness...and How Places of Worship Can Help

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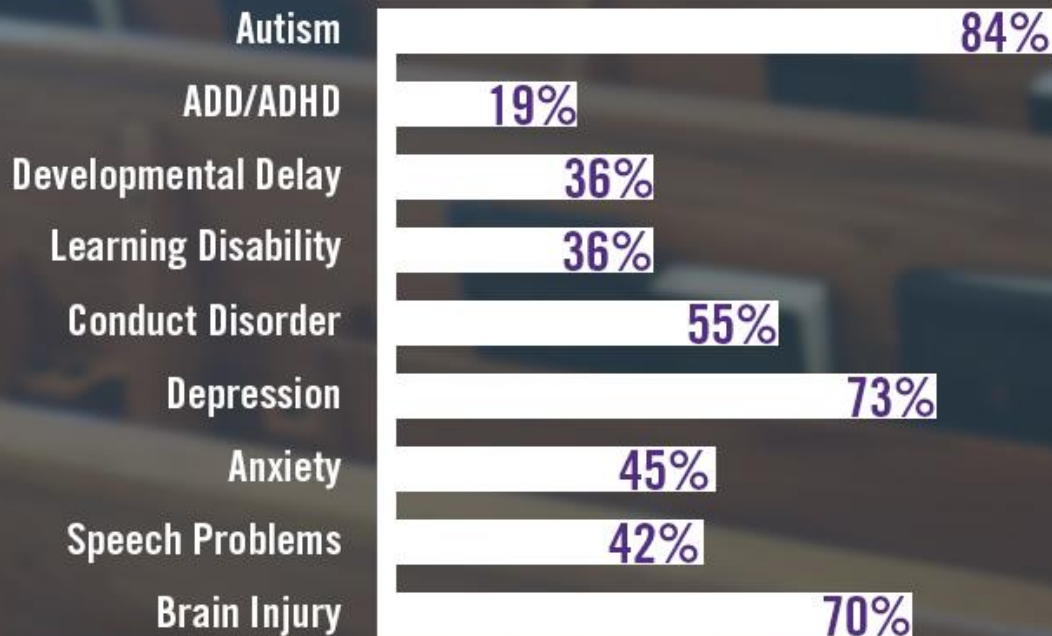


# Our objectives today...

- Examine available research addressing the impacts of mental illness on worship attendance/participation.
- Recognize barriers to assimilation for children and adults with common mental health conditions.
- Introduce a mental health inclusion model adaptable to churches/faith-based organizations.
- Explore innovative examples from churches pursuing mental health inclusion



**CLEMSON  
RESEARCH  
EXAMINES HOW  
CHRONIC HEALTH  
CONDITIONS  
AFFECT CHURCH  
ATTENDANCE  
AMONG YOUNG  
PEOPLE**



**The percent increase in odds of children with chronic health conditions never attending church compared to children with no health conditions**

Figure 22. God's Worriers: Percentage Of Depressed And Non-depressed Who:

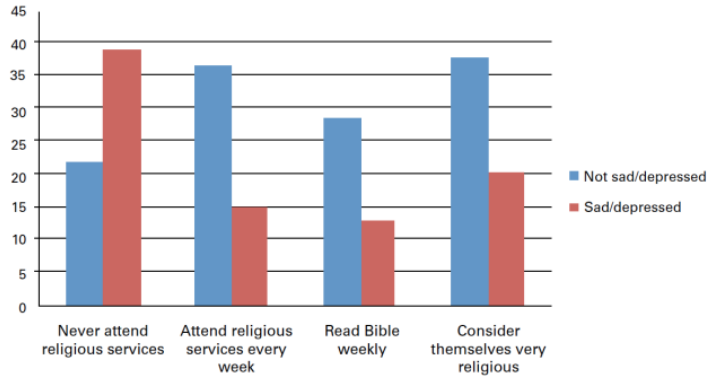
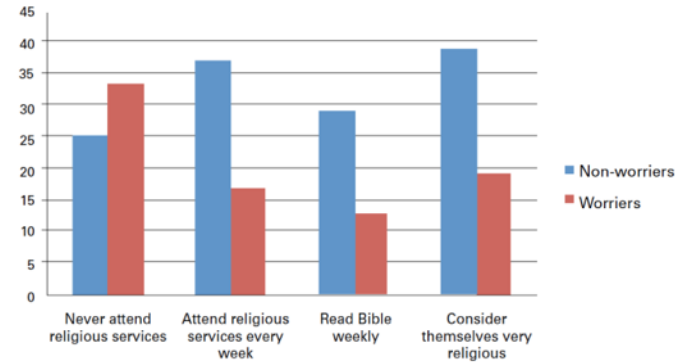


Figure 21. Religious Behaviors For Non-worriers And Worriers



**Depression and anxiety have a profound impact on church attendance and spiritual practice among adults**

A group of people, including men in suits and women in dresses, are walking up the stone steps of a church entrance. The church has large arched doorways and a classic architectural style. The scene is slightly dimly lit, suggesting an overcast day or late afternoon.

**Why is  
church  
participation  
so difficult?**

Traits associated with common mental health conditions often clash with “church culture” – how we expect people should act when we come together

# Seven barriers to including families impacted by mental illness at church

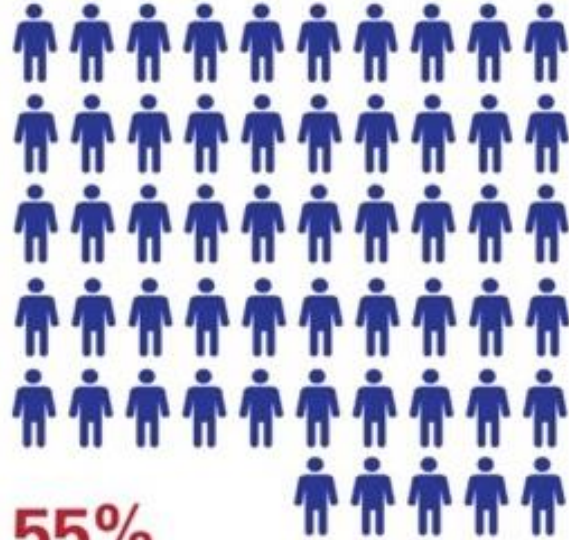
- Stigma
- Anxiety
- Capacity for self-control
- Sensory processing
- Social communication
- Social isolation
- Past church experiences



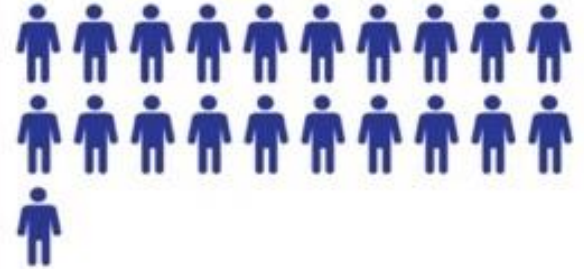
# Stigma

A widespread perception among adults outside of the church that persons with mental illness aren't welcome...


## Unchurched people don't believe people with mental illness are welcome at church



**55%**  
Who never attend  
worship services



**21%**  
Who attend worship  
services once a  
week or more

A man with a beard, wearing a blue button-down shirt, stands on the left, looking down with a somber expression. To his right, a young girl with curly hair, wearing a blue sleeveless dress, stands with her arms crossed, looking away from him. The background is a plain, dark grey.

**“People in the church believe they can tell when a disability ends and bad parenting begins.”**



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# Anxiety

People with anxiety  
overestimate threat, risk in  
unfamiliar situations

- Social anxiety
- Separation anxiety
- Agoraphobia
- Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder





**What church activities are challenging for children and teens with anxiety?**

- Separating from parents at worship
- Unfamiliar situations... retreats/mission trips
- Self-disclosure in small groups
- Large group social situations
- Transitions between age-group ministries



# Challenges at church for adults with anxiety

- Visiting a church for the first time
- Fear becoming focus of attention
- Seating near an exit (agoraphobia)
- Meeting new people
- Joining a small group
- Self-disclosure
- Using the phone



# Self-control

Executive functioning refers to cognitive abilities involved with modulating other abilities and behaviors.

- Behavioral inhibition
- Verbal working memory
- Non-verbal working memory
- Emotional self-regulation
- Reconstitution



# Sensory Processing

- **NOISE, LIGHT, TOUCH AND SMELLS THAT OTHERS FIND ENGAGING ARE AVERSIVE**
- **Challenges for kids:**
  - Pick up and drop-off times
  - High energy worship
  - Vulnerability to aggressive behavior when overstimulated
- **Challenges for adults:**
  - Greeting times (hugging, handshakes)
  - Decibel level during worship
  - Multiple conversations within earshot





# Social Communication

DIFFICULTIES AT CHURCH FOR  
PERSONS WHO STRUGGLE TO  
PROCESS SOCIAL CUES

## Church-specific challenges:

- Small talk
- Small groups
- Bullies
- Unfamiliar situations

A person wearing a grey hoodie and blue jeans is sitting on the ground against a brick wall. They are looking down and to the left, with their hands clasped in their lap. The background is a brick wall and some foliage.

**HOW DO PEOPLE FIND YOUR  
CHURCH IF THEY DON'T KNOW  
SOMEONE ATTENDING YOUR  
CHURCH?**

# **Social Isolation**

- Parents less likely to connect with neighbors through children's activities, friendships
- Isolation as a symptom of depression, anxiety



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# Past Experiences of Church

**THE APPLE OFTEN DOESN'T  
FALL FAR FROM THE TREE!**

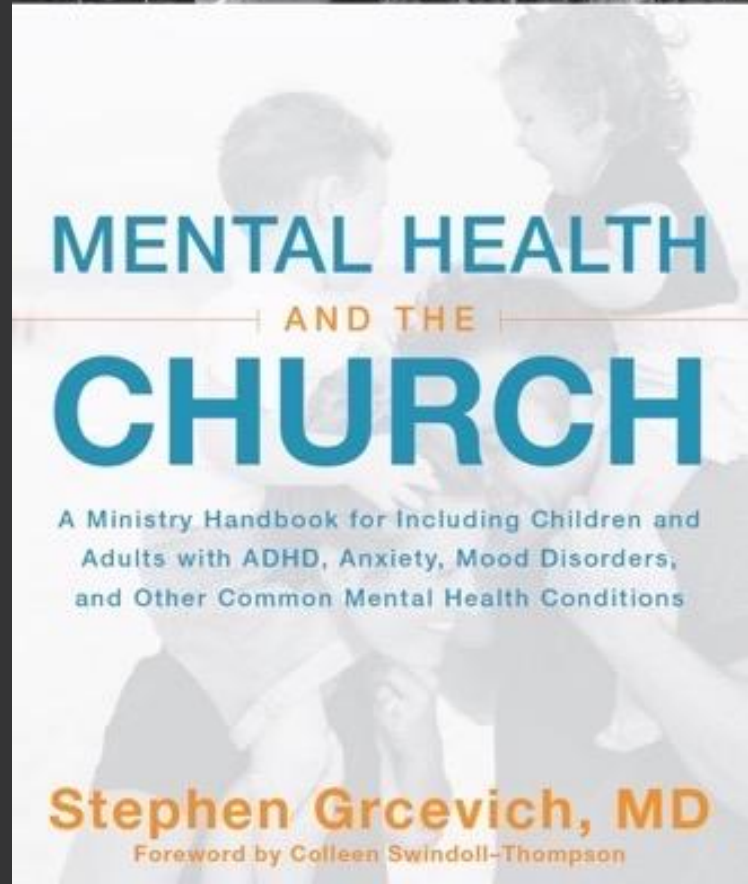
- Lack of support from church in a time of need.
- No one noticed when they were missing
- No help offered when a child experienced struggles
- Adults with mental health concerns as children never got in habit of attending





# The foundation of Key Ministry's mental health inclusion ministry model

- Recognize non-essential features of ministry activities, environments, that make church attendance more difficult
- Implementation of strategies across all areas of ministry to welcome children, adults and their families



# Seven strategies for promoting mental health inclusion (TEACHER)

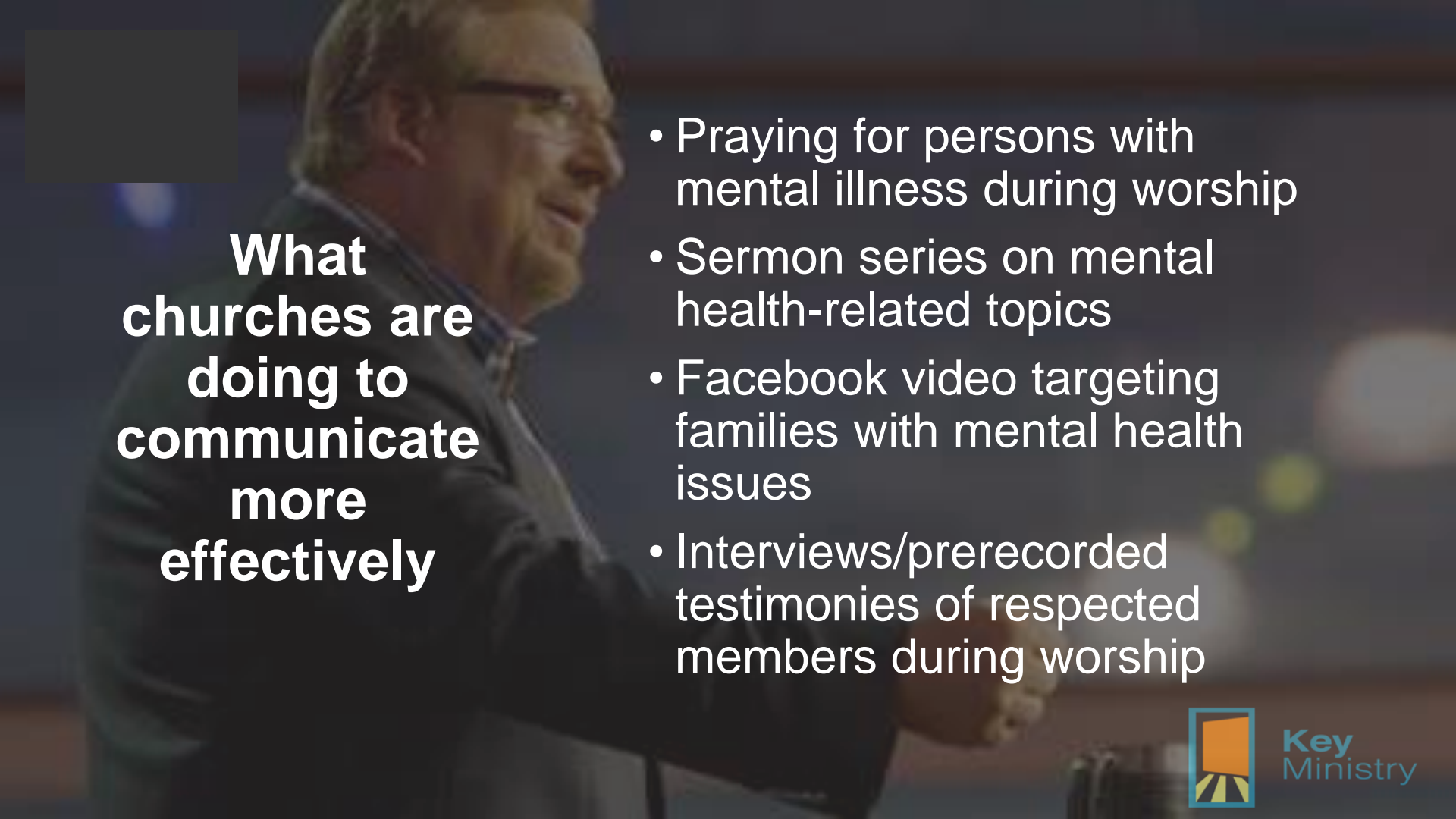
- Assemble your inclusion team
- Create more welcoming ministry environments.
- Focus on activities central to spiritual growth
- Develop a mental health communication strategy
- Help families with their most heartfelt needs
- Offer education and support
- Empower your people to be responsible



# Five attributes of a mental health friendly church

- Demonstrates an intentional inclusion planning process
- Educates church staff, volunteers on mental illness
- Implements a mental health communication strategy
- Provides practical help to individuals, families affected
- Offers mental health-specific education/support groups



A man with glasses and a dark suit is shown in profile, speaking at a podium. The background is blurred, suggesting a church or conference setting. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

**What  
churches are  
doing to  
communicate  
more  
effectively**

- Praying for persons with mental illness during worship
- Sermon series on mental health-related topics
- Facebook video targeting families with mental health issues
- Interviews/prerecorded testimonies of respected members during worship



# Mental Health Education and Support

- Training for pastors, church staff, volunteers
  - Seminaries
  - Mental Health First Aid
  - Trauma-informed care
- Christian-based mental health education, support
  - Fresh Hope
  - Grace Alliance
  - Celebrate Recovery
  - My Quiet Cave
- Mental health support
  - NAMI



# Mental Health Awareness Sunday

- Strategy for introducing a mental health ministry
- Outreach to friends, neighbors
- Teaching on mental health-related topics
- Great event for small-medium size churches
- Church “conversation” can be very powerful!



Manage Videos ▾ Product ▾ Solutions ▾ Watch ▾ Upgrade Search videos, people, and r



John Meaux Jill Oatey Kristen Bergmann

### Mental Health Chat - A Conversation with BPC's Counselors

ago | More

Presbyterian Church PRO  Following

More from  Autoplay



## Other Innovative Practices

- Online mental health “chats”
- Establishing role for a “mental health liaison”
- Mental health education cards/resource center in prominent location
- Providing space for community agencies, professional counselors
  - Khesed Wellness

# Key principles for an effective mental health inclusion strategy...

- Inclusion is a mindset – not a program
- Kids with mental health issues have parents with mental health issues!
- A good strategy benefits *everyone* and doesn't require *anyone* to self-identify
- Ministry owned by the people, supported by staff





# Help from Key Ministry

- Training
  - Conferences
  - Video training
  - Roundtables
- Consultation to churches
- Resources
  - Networking with other ministries
  - Social media, sermon videos, research
- Someone to come alongside your ministry!

## Resources for Mental Health Ministry

The majority of our resources are offered to ministry leaders at no charge. How may we assist you today?



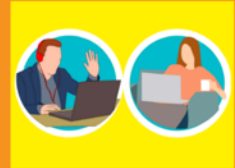
Get Started:  
Mental Health  
Inclusion Ministry

GET STARTED



Articles

ARTICLES



Request a Free  
Consultation

CONTACT US



Ministry Handbook



Conferences &  
Training Opportunities



Disability Ministry  
Video Roundtables

# Connect with Key Ministry

- [keyministry.org](http://keyministry.org)
- Facebook: Key Ministry
- Twitter: @KeyMinistry
- Catherine Boyle – Director of Mental Health Ministry
  - [catherine@keyministry.org](mailto:catherine@keyministry.org)
  - [steve@keyministry.org](mailto:steve@keyministry.org)



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