Supporting young people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Young people with ASD can be intelligent, witty, thoughtful, truth-tellers and problem solvers. If they have a special interest that they are willing to tell you about, you will get the opportunity to learn things about God's creation that you never knew.

However, beneath the surface.....

.....most people with ASD are working overtime to manage their anxiety and hide the behaviours that they fear could make them stand out.

Tips for supporting young people with ASD

Take the time to inform them about what will be happening during the time church service, Sunday school lesson or youth event.

Provide them with things such as the sermon outline, the order of service and let them know if there will be a guest preacher or special interview
Let them know if their minister or favourite youth leader is going to be away that week.
Be aware that lots of movement and loud noises can be distressing for people with ASD. Provide them with a quiet space to rest and regroup if they become overwhelmed.

Don't ask a person with ASD to read in front of others unless you know that they are very comfortable with reading out loud. They will volunteer if they feel comfortable reading during Bible studies.

Give them advance notice if you are going to ask the young person a question during a study and give them time to formulate their answer.

For example:
John, I would love you to think about how you would answer question 5 when we get to it. Would that be okay?

Explain games and activities clearly, pausing regularly to allow youth to process what you have said and encouraging them to ask questions if they are unsure about anything.

If a young person appears unusually anxious, is beginning to pace, sweat, talk at an increasingly rapid pace or, shows other signs of distress, suggest they take a break.

Send someone with the young person to go and get a drink, take a bathroom break or take a break in a quiet, yet supervised area for 5 - 10 minutes.