

Survey Results*

People with sensory sensitivity exhibit heightened emotional responsiveness, increased sensitivity to environmental stimuli, and deep information processing. Worship services present challenges for them due to sensory, social, and emotional factors. However, academic research and practical resources on sensory sensitivity in worship contexts is limited.

challenges

TOP CHALLENGES REPORTED

PEOPLE WITH SENSORY SENSITIVITY IDENTIFIED SEVERAL KEY CHALLENGES DURING WORSHIP SERVICES:	39.8%	→ Prolonged periods of sitting or standing
	36.1%	→ Lengthy prayers or rituals
	33.8%	→ Loud music/singing/clapping
	32.2%	→ Confined or crowded spaces
	29.9%	→ Large crowds
	28.1%	→ Too much social interaction

feelings

RESULTING FEELINGS

AS A CONSEQUENCE OF THESE CHALLENGES, INDIVIDUALS WITH SENSORY SENSITIVITY REPORTED EXPERIENCING A RANGE OF EMOTIONS:	48.6%	→ Feeling overwhelmed and anxious
	38.0%	→ Stressed, on edge
	36.1%	→ Disconnected from the worship experience
	32.2%	→ Exhausted, drained from "keeping it together"
	22.3%	→ Misunderstood, judged by the congregation
	21.7%	→ Guilty, ashamed for not fully engaging
	18.2%	→ Isolated, excluded from the worship community

* 702 adults with sensory sensitivity, 514 parents of children with sensory sensitivity, and 106 ministry leaders completed a survey.

responses

BEHAVIORAL RESPONSES

- PEOPLE WITH SENSORY SENSITIVITY COPE WITH THESE FEELINGS BY:**
- 47.8%** → Attending religious services less frequently
 - 32.3%** → Avoiding certain types of services
 - 28.5%** → Leaving early or arriving late to services
 - 28.1%** → Seeking alternative ways to engage with their faith
 - 26.9%** → Decreasing level of participation during services
 - 14.1%** → Stopping attending religious services altogether

strategies

EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR REGULATION

- DESPITE THESE CHALLENGES, INDIVIDUALS FOUND SEVERAL STRATEGIES HELPFUL IN REGULATING THEIR SENSORY EXPERIENCES DURING SERVICES:**
- 37.3%** → Seeking solitude or taking breaks
 - 37.0%** → Engaging in personal prayer
 - 30.0%** → Practicing deep breathing exercises
 - 29.8%** → Sitting in the back of the room
 - 21.8%** → Using sensory aids such as fidgets or stress balls

MINISTRY LEADERS

- THESE FINDINGS UNDERSCORE THE IMPORTANCE OF ENHANCING EDUCATION AND RESOURCES FOR MINISTRY LEADERS TO CREATE MORE INCLUSIVE WORSHIP ENVIRONMENTS.**
- 68.9% of ministry leaders were moderately familiar with sensory sensitivities, but only 32% had formal education.
 - Despite this, 88.1% were open to implementing changes for better support.
 - Only 23.2% were familiar with available resources.
 - Nonetheless, 56% tried to implement supportive strategies.
 - **EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES INCLUDED:**
 - Providing a designated quiet or calming space (45.3%)
 - Encouraging individuals to communicate their needs or preferences to clergy or volunteers (28.2%)
 - Providing noise-canceling headphones or earplugs (22%)
 - Implementing a support system within the congregation (26.9%).
 - These findings underscore the importance of enhancing education and resources for ministry leaders to create more inclusive worship environments.