

IBCCES

**International Board of Credentialing
and Continuing Education Standards**



Gilbert Parks & Recreation

Facilities Audit & Recommendations:

Creating A Welcoming Space For
Autistic Visitors and Residents

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Overview

Arising from its leadership's desire to become a welcoming space for people with autism and related sensory disorders, Gilbert Parks and Recreation underwent an audit conducted by International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards (IBCCES), a cognitive disorder training and certification organization.

Delivering the Global Standard for Training & Certification in the Field of Cognitive Disorders

IBCCES provides a series of certifications that empower professionals to be leaders in their field and improve the outcomes for the individuals they serve. These programs are recognized around the world as the leading benchmark for training and certification in the areas of autism and other cognitive disorders. As part of our commitment to sharing the latest innovations and research, we host the International Symposium on Cognitive Research and Disorders to create a forum for collaboration among industry stakeholders.

IBCCES adheres to international standards for boards that grant professional credentials. The IBCCES certification procedures and content undergo various reviews and validation, pursuant to the professions that are eligible for certification, as well as standards established by content experts in the field.

IBCCES has organized the results of their audit into an easy-to-read report grouped into sections that list factors important to people with autism, their loved ones, and their caregivers.

Audit Date: October 2022

Auditor: Meredith Tekin

General Considerations

Pre-Visit Planning

Often, families who have a loved one with special needs need to speak with a facility's staff before they arrive to explain what their family member needs. Parents and caregivers of autistic individuals and those with sensory issues, as well as staff, need a credible source that can assist them with frequent questions and concerns.

Ensure that processes and procedures are consistent and all staff who engage with the public are aware of those policies and procedures. It is critical that visitors receive consistent and correct information when asking about accommodations or policies.

Always ensure staff are easily identifiable with nametags and consistent organizational clothing (include how to identify staff in your social stories or other guides). Also, for staff who have completed autism training, ensure they are using a name tag decal or locations can display window clings (provided by IBCCES) that notates this.

Creating social stories or other visual tools for visitors to access online before they arrive at the facility will help them understand what to expect, who to go to for help, and what will be expected of them when they arrive. Create additional/more detailed social stories for special events or featured assets to show visitors what to expect before they come.

- Visual aids, including video and photos from a “first-person perspective” help individuals with autism or other needs prepare for their visit and help reduce the chance for overstimulation or meltdowns. This way, they can “practice” the experience and plan ahead.
- Create an internal communications plan to ensure staff are aware and knowledgeable about these tools.

In locations that don't have one already, strongly recommend adding a bathroom with an adult changing table to premises – family/gender neutral bathrooms and nursing mother's areas are also nice to have and to communicate on pre-visit documentation.

- An adult changing table is a huge benefit to many individuals with differing needs and would be something to promote in the accessibility guide as well.

The website for Gilbert Parks and Recreation has a lot of information and ways to access that information via various links, newsletters, and web pages. In some cases, this may be overwhelming for new users who are not sure where to look or which avenue to take. Recommend setting up an accessibility page with links and information on the IBCCES certification, but also all of the related services and classes that can be

adapted or have sensory aspects. This can also house any sensory guides, social stories, or other information.

- As a side note, some of the areas of the site were a bit difficult to read, such as on the Recreation Guide where links and drop downs were in white text on a light yellow background – a higher contrast (black text) would be easier to read. Recommend reviewing the site for general accessibility and updating items where possible. There are also add-on or widget tools such as <https://equally.ai/> to help make your site more accessible.

Environment

Body Awareness

Some people with autism and other neurological issues have difficulty with body awareness, perception, and navigating unfamiliar settings. Some of them also have additional movement challenges, such as differences with fine motor skills or keeping their balance.

This is especially important to remember for safety concerns, such as water activities or proximity to bodies of water.

- Autistic individuals have a high rate of death caused by drowning and may wander or elope in certain scenarios. Anecdotally, many autistic individuals and children are drawn to water, but are not strong swimmers, thus adding to the drowning dangers and statistics.
- Autistic swimmers may also not understand or comply with certain commands or requests and may react differently than neurotypical swimmers if in distress.
- Ensure swim instructors, lifeguards, and other staff are trained and aware of how to work with autistic individuals

Individuals may also have balance issues or concerns we all as need breaks from enclosed spaces or crowds.

- Consider identifying low sensory spaces or protocols for when visitors feel overwhelmed or may be overstimulated. In most of the outdoor parks or other spaces, there are plenty of spots to take a break as long as the park is not

overutilized, but particularly for staff working with classes, camps, or other activities, additional procedures and protocols may need to be emphasized.

- Add these areas along with other areas of interest to trail maps and park guides.

Physical Environment

Autistic individuals or those with other sensory disorders often prefer a clutter-free environment that has sensory “safe” spaces.

They are often sensitive to the sights, sounds, and feel of their environment. Spaces designed for ASD minimize sensory input that might overwhelm them, such as buzzing from fluorescent lighting and other things that most others might not notice.

In some cases, this may not be changeable, but where possible, reduce the reliance on fluorescent or bright overhead lights (or add dimmer switches), and use attractive but less stimulating colors such as blues, greens, or even lavender.

Smooth transitions from space to space reassure routine, an important issue for those with autism.

Quiet areas or rooms can provide a safe haven for those who feel overwhelmed. These can be designated with signage, can be outdoors or indoors, and can be as simple as an umbrella or shade and park bench.

- Will note specific areas for locations reviewed in later sections
- The important item to note when providing low sensory or quiet spaces is to ensure the space’s intended purpose or usage is clear (including physical signage designating it as a low sensory area).
- In addition, ensure the availability is consistent and is not a “multi-purpose” area where users might be disturbed by others in the space using it for another purpose (for example, a nursing mother’s area should not double as a quiet room for individuals experiencing sensory overload).

It was also noted during review that some areas, such as gyms or areas with workout equipment, had strong chemical/rubber smells. Ensure cleaning supplies are reviewed for any harsh smells and look into whether other options are available for these spaces to reduce the strong smell. In some cases, individuals may just want to avoid those areas.

Sound

Many autistic individuals can be hypersensitive to acute or high-pitched noise that they can't control. These sounds can feel like a sharp pain to them or be very distracting, and they either cover their ears with their fingers or may want to use ear defenders/noise cancelling headphones. An alternative is to hide the offensive sound by masking it with "white noise." Sometimes, the slightest sound can be distracting or irritating, and this includes "ticking or a "hum."

In some areas, there may be noises as noted from equipment, HVAC, or other guests. If these concerns cannot be eliminated or reduced, it is recommended to communicate this to guests or have some noise cancelling headphones or ear plugs available upon request.

Also ensure it is noted if locations or activities are headphone friendly or have safety requirements (such as helmets for batting cages) that would prevent these adaptations from being used.

Balance and Vestibular Support

Certain movements that cause a self-soothing effect can help stress levels. Many children and adults with autism will perform this soothing mechanism to calm themselves. Restricting this movement, especially for people who are used to doing it, may cause anxiety. Stimming is a common behavior and, unless harmful, should not be altered or addressed.

Recommend ensuring, where possible, there are areas for seating, handrails, and smooth transitions so individuals who struggle with balance issues can feel reassured and safety is enhanced.

Sensory guides will note any sensory impacts, but uneven terrain or lack of seating may need to be noted for certain areas in online guides.

Communication

Although effective communication is essential for all people, it is even more important to communicate clearly with people who have autism. Clear communication that indicates appropriate movement and behavior prevents stress and misunderstanding. Consistency in communication, as well as consistent non-verbal signs and processes, help aid communication immensely for people with autism.

Consider adding communication boards or other alternative communication supports to encourage children and adults of all ages and needs to normalize and recognize that non-verbal does not mean being unable to communicate and to assist non-verbal individuals in these areas.

- Many individuals may use their own assistive device if this is a common need for them - but in some cases it can help if the person has lost their family or device.
- Communication Boards feature symbol-based or simplistic images along with common phrases or words (depending on the setting) so non-verbal individuals can point and communicate basic needs. Examples would be symbols and verbiage for phrases like yes, no, food, drink, need, help, want, sad, happy, etc. Incorporate sensory guides and other accommodation information on physical signage in parks and facilities, as well as the website and any other printed materials.

Ensure all signage includes symbols or pictures to indicate usage for areas in addition to written words, as well as consider increasing signage when appropriate – most areas reviewed by IBCCES would benefit from additional signage directing visitors to key areas such as bathrooms, exits, and other areas of interest.

Sensory

Touch/Tactile

Many autistic individuals are hypo- or hyper-sensitive to touch. Touch sensitivity can vary in pressure and be applicable to distinct parts of the body. While some people with autism prefer only light or no touch, others calm with firm pressure like being squeezed tightly into clothing or in the corner of a room.

Touching someone with autism incorrectly can cause acute reactions and great stress. Ensure staff are reminded of this and is necessary, they can act appropriately ins situations where safety is concerned.

Consider for areas with engaging sensory play such as dino digs, water tables or splash pads, that additional sensory signage is added as well as highlight these areas on the website for visitors who may be looking for these types of features.

Taste/Gustatory

Many autistic individuals have specific needs or strong preferences related to food and mealtimes. This can include being labeled as “fussy eaters”, having restrictive or repetitive patterns around types of foods they will eat, not wanting food to touch, or may need to eat a specialized diet such as gluten free.

For locations that offer food services or snacks, ensuring that there are menus with information on allergens or other dietary needs (many individuals on the spectrum have restricted diets such as dairy free, gluten free, etc.) so visitors can be aware of availability.

- It’s also helpful to provide menus with photos for each food item – for individuals who are nonverbal it helps greatly to avoid meltdowns and ensure parents and caregivers can assist in ordering the exact food item the individual desires.
- It can be useful to provide specific information on your web and digital communication regarding food policies and restrictions, such as if visitors are able to bring their own food onsite.

Escape

For individuals with autism (and other disabilities), the ability to “escape” or leave an unfriendly environment is extremely important. Some individuals may be prone to “wandering” or “elopement”, not only when they are distressed, but also in pursuit of special interests and may be drawn to water. It is, therefore, important to indicate to someone with autism that he/she can leave a stressful situation and to direct them to a more calming, soothing environment, and to ensure staff are trained to know where to look and how to behave if an individual does go missing or wanders away from their caregiver.

Providing direction to low sensory areas and training staff to understand this need is critical to de-escalating situations where individuals with autism may become overstimulated or stressed.

Also, review all outdoor areas for barriers or deterrents from individuals eloping into busy roadways, bodies of water, or other areas.

Gilbert Regional Park

Observations and Recommendations

Environment/Safety:

This is a highly utilized and busy park space, potentially even on weekdays.

There is a splash pad onsite, with the ability for visitors to press a button to turn on water sprays/fountain areas. There is no music in this area.

Reservations for cabanas and picnic areas are posted with a QR code so information is up to date.

It was noted during the review that there is an adult changing table available at this location.

This location has multiple levels of play, various play structure, and a very engaging environment. It was noted there is a potential for wandering or escape if an individual slides or quickly moves down to a different level than their caregiver or parent.

There are varying surface areas for walking and playing, which could be challenging for some individuals – including paved walkways, mulch, rubber, and grass.

- There is some basic signage as to the use of some play areas with age ranges listed. Recommend adding additional symbol-based communication as well as sensory guide information for these areas.

It was also noted there is no barrier around the lake in some areas, nor the amphitheater area, but there is some fencing/barriers planned.

- Highly recommend adding some sort of deterrent or barriers for bodies of water to ensure safety. In any case, information about this should be on all pre-planning communication so caregivers and visitors are aware of this potential danger.

The Sister Cities area is a nice area to rest and explore.

- Recommend continuing to enhance this area and ensure there is signage to indicate its location and use. Consider some additional low sensory engaging designs.

Riparian Preserve

Observations and Recommendations

Environment/Safety:

This location has various areas for engagement in nature, including walking paths, a play area with a dino dig, and more.

It was noted during review this is a popular location for school field trips and tourists.

This area has relatively low visual engagement, with primarily natural-colored structures and scenery.

It was noted there was some noise from nearby roadways as well as wildlife, birds in particular. This will be noted on the sensory guides.

There are areas where individuals can access bodies of water without barriers or obstruction.

- Recommend adding some barriers or communicating to visitors so they can be more vigilant when visiting.

There was some signage onsite with primarily text to communicate.

- Recommend adding additional signage for wayfinding, sensory guides, and to ensure visitors understand all the options available at this location. Include symbol-based communication as well.

Cactus Yards

Observations and Recommendations

This location was noted as a public park during the day along with night leagues and rentals, and then as a location to host tournaments (with gate fee) during weekends.

The location is completely fenced although there are multiple exit points. There are no misters onsite and little shade.

- Consider adding additional shaded areas if possible

It was noted that there is an indoor soccer field with amenities that is not currently open to the public.

There are no adult changing tables onsite.

- Recommend adding these options and ensuring regular changing tables in all restrooms. Ensure this information is on the website and in accessibility guides or visitor information.

It was noted that the play areas are scheduled to be updated in the future.

- Ensure there is accessibility for individuals who may have difficulty navigating varying surfaces or may use a wheelchair.
- Consider adding some inclusive play structures such as “Cozy Cocoon” for visitors who may need a bit of a sensory break or barrier but still want to be near the play areas.

There are restaurants onsite that provide much needed air conditioning and a break from the sun, along with food and drinks.

- Ensure food policies and menus are available online and provide detailed information on nutritional content/allergens for food served onsite.

There was little space for an indoor sensory area, and many areas outdoors are heavily utilized.

- Recommend adding a tent/cabana type structure that can be closed off with flaps to ensure visual stimulation is reduced and the area is not drawing unwanted attention if someone is having a meltdown. Alternatively, if the area is more remote, a shady or covered area with a table or benches could be used.
 - Consider soliciting a sponsor or partner to fund these spaces (logo could be printed on the tent or signage).
 - Choose a soothing neutral color for the tent and/or umbrellas – beige, light blues, greens, or even lavender can be calming.

- Make sure to “air out” the tent/umbrellas and other items that can have a noticeable smell. In some cases, these smells can be upsetting for individuals with sensory sensitivities.
- Consider seating that is welcoming and soft, such as seats or a table with rounded edges.
- You can provide some sensory items such as fidget toys or soft plushies, but this is not required.
- Ensure the location of low sensory spaces is noted and easy to find on the website and any pre-visit documentation, onsite signage, etc. Also ensure low sensory spaces have signage indicating their intended use (e.g., “This is a low sensory zone for guests who need to take a sensory break. Please be respectful.”)
- Even if visitors don’t need to use the low sensory zone, the fact that one is available can ease any anxiety or trepidation about potentially visiting.

Freestone Park

Observations and Recommendations

This park features multiple play areas, a lake, a skate park, baseball fields, ramadas, etc., as well as a private partnership with an organization that runs a children's area with a train and carousel. It was noted that this area is very busy on weekends in particular.

- Recommend creating a barrier or fencing around water areas to prevent unwanted access. If not, ensure information is included in pre-visit materials, signage and website to alert visitors so they can be extra vigilant.
- Review the policies and recommendations with any vendors or partners (such as the organization that runs the children's area/carousel) to ensure a consistent visitor experience.

Freestone Recreation Center

Observations and Recommendations

This rec center is membership-based but does host some events open to the public.

It was noted that the facility is in the process of updating all gym and parking lights to LED.

- Consider reviewing indoor lighting as well, adding dimmer switches, removing fluorescent lights, and adjusting as possible.

Some areas were noisy where sound echoed noticeably, such as the gym and cycle room. This will be noted on sensory guides.

There is no adult changing table onsite.

- Recommend adding an adult changing table as this is helpful for visitors with a variety of needs and disabilities.







Some areas, such as the Kiddy corner, smelled of cleaning supplies, which can be triggering for some visitors. This will be noted on the sensory guide.

It was noted during review that during camp, a sensory box was offered, and campers could "chill out" in the office if needed.

- Offering the airconditioned office as a low sensory space is helpful. Ensure campers are able to take a break and then rejoin their peers, if possible, by adjusting activities, or offering "side by side" options.

- Consider adding a designated low sensory space in the Kiddy area or elsewhere. This could be as simple as a tent or covered structure within the play area where individuals can get a bit of a break.
 - This could also be an outdoor cabana or shaded spot. It was noted there may be space for this in the Assembly Room, or to utilize the alcove right outside the Assembly Room for this purpose.

Sensory Guides






 Sensory Guide™ Sensory Levels (1= Low Sensory Stimulation, 10= High Sensory Stimulation)				
Gilbert Regional Park-The Mountain		Gilbert, AZ		ISD#9100
TOUCH  6	TASTE  1	SOUND  4	SIGHT  4	SMELL  1
PARTICIPANT GUIDELINES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large, multi-level play structure with opportunity to run, jump, climb, swing, slide, and explore. • Lots of opportunity for tactile engagement • Multiple walking and play surfaces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low impact on this sense 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Likely proximity to other visitors, especially when busy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outdoors/natural lighting, some shade available • Some bright colors, lots of engaging play structures
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low impact on this sense

Sensory Levels (1= Low Sensory Stimulation, 10= High Sensory Stimulation)

Gilbert Regional Park–The Falls

Gilbert, AZ

ISD#9101

	TOUCH	TASTE	SOUND	SIGHT	SMELL
	 <p>5</p>	 <p>2</p>	 <p>5</p>	 <p>4</p>	 <p>2</p>
PARTICIPANT GUIDELINES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large splash pad area • Some interactive features, buckets, sprays, and jets • Lots of opportunity for tactile engagement • Smooth paved area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low impact on this sense • Potential for water to splash in mouth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Likely proximity to other visitors, especially when busy • Sound of water 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outdoors/natural lighting • Some bright colors, lots of engaging play areas • Potential for water to splash in eyes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low impact on this sense • Potential for slight scent of water

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Sensory Levels (1= Low Sensory Stimulation, 10= High Sensory Stimulation)

Gilbert Regional Park-The Creek

Gilbert, AZ

ISD#9102

TOUCH



6

TASTE



1

SOUND



4

SIGHT



4

SMELL



1

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PARTICIPANT GUIDELINES

- Play structure with opportunity to run, jump, climb, slide, and explore.
- Lots of opportunity for tactile engagement
- Multiple walking and play surfaces
- Designed for younger visitors

- Low impact on this sense

- Likely proximity to other visitors, especially when busy






- Outdoors/natural lighting, some shade available
- Some bright colors, lots of engaging play structures

- Low impact on this sense

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Sensory Levels (1= Low Sensory Stimulation, 10= High Sensory Stimulation)

Gilbert Regional Park-Sister Cities Friendship Garden Gilbert, AZ ISD#9103

	TOUCH	TASTE	SOUND	SIGHT	SMELL
					
	2	1	2	3	1
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PARTICIPANT GUIDELINES

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low impact on this sense • Space features art and sculpture, as well as a view of the mountains • Some seating and areas for reflection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low impact on this sense 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential for close proximity to other visitors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outdoors/natural lighting • Some bright colors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low impact on this sense 	<small>© IBCCES ALL RIGHTS RESERVED</small>
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Sensory Levels (1= Low Sensory Stimulation, 10= High Sensory Stimulation)

Riparian Preserve-Dino Dig

Gilbert, AZ

ISD#9104

TOUCH



5

TASTE



1

SOUND



4

SIGHT



3

SMELL



1

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PARTICIPANT GUIDELINES

- Shaded area where visitors can "dig" for dinosaur bones and fossils
- Lots of opportunity for tactile engagement in sand

- Low impact on this sense

- Potential proximity to other guests, especially when busy

- Outdoors/natural lighting, some shade available
- Mostly neutral colors

- Low impact on this sense

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Sensory Levels (1= Low Sensory Stimulation, 10= High Sensory Stimulation)

Riparian Preserve–Observatory

Gilbert, AZ

ISD#9105

TOUCH



2

TASTE



1

SOUND



3

SIGHT



3

SMELL



1

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PARTICIPANT GUIDELINES

- Opportunity to view sky through a telescope during specified hours

- Low impact on this sense

- Potential proximity to other visitors in an enclosed space

- Indoors/enclosed space
- Opportunity to view stars and other objects in the sky through a telescope

- Low impact on this sense

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Sensory Levels (1= Low Sensory Stimulation, 10= High Sensory Stimulation)

Cactus Yards

Gilbert, AZ

ISD#9106

TOUCH



2

TASTE



1

SOUND



4

SIGHT



2

SMELL



1

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PARTICIPANT GUIDELINES

- Multiple sports fields
- Mostly paved walkways
- Seating available for spectators

- Low impact on this sense

- Potential proximity to other visitors, cheering or other noise from crowds

- Outdoors/natural lighting, some shade available

- Low impact on this sense

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Sensory Levels (1= Low Sensory Stimulation, 10= High Sensory Stimulation)

Cactus Yards-Playground

Gilbert, AZ

ISD#9107

TOUCH



5

TASTE



1

SOUND



4

SIGHT



2

SMELL



1

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PARTICIPANT GUIDELINES

- Play area with opportunity to climb, slide, and play
- Designed for younger visitors
- Various play surfaces including mulch

- Low impact on this sense

- Potential proximity to other visitors

- Outdoors/natural lighting, some shade available
- Mostly neutral colors

- Low impact on this sense

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Sensory Levels (1= Low Sensory Stimulation, 10= High Sensory Stimulation)

Freestone Park-Playgrounds

Gilbert, AZ

ISD#9108

TOUCH



6

TASTE



1

SOUND



5

SIGHT



4

SMELL



1

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PARTICIPANT GUIDELINES

- Multiple play areas for various ages, featuring opportunities to climb, slide & swing
- Lots of opportunity for free play & tactile exploration
- Various surfaces including mulch, rubber, & pavement

- Low impact on this sense

- Potential proximity to other visitors
- Some play areas include musical or noisy features

- Outdoors/natural lighting, some shade available
- Some bright colors, engaging play structures

- Low impact on this sense

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Sensory Levels (1= Low Sensory Stimulation, 10= High Sensory Stimulation)

Freestone Recreation Center-Kiddy Korner

Gilbert, AZ

ISD#9109

TOUCH



4

TASTE



1

SOUND



5

SIGHT



4

SMELL



3

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PARTICIPANT GUIDELINES

- Multiple play areas, toys, and activities
- Lots of opportunity for free play

- Low impact on this sense

- Proximity to other visitors indoors

- Indoors/artificial lighting
- Some bright colors, engaging play areas

- May detect scent of cleaning supplies, art supplies, etc.

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Sensory Levels (1= Low Sensory Stimulation, 10= High Sensory Stimulation)

Freestone Recreation Center-Kiddy Korner Outdoor Play Area

Gilbert, AZ

ISD#9110

TOUCH



5

TASTE



1

SOUND



5

SIGHT



3

SMELL



1

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PARTICIPANT GUIDELINES

- Multiple play areas featuring opportunities to climb, slide & explore
- Primarily a soft, bouncy rubber surface for walking
- Other toys available in this area

- Low impact on this sense

- Proximity to other visitors indoors

- Outdoors/natural lighting, some shade available
- Some bright colors, engaging play structures

- Low impact on this sense

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Sensory Levels (1= Low Sensory Stimulation, 10= High Sensory Stimulation)

Freestone Recreation Center

Gilbert, AZ

ISD#9111

TOUCH



5

TASTE



1

SOUND



4

SIGHT



3

SMELL



3

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PARTICIPANT GUIDELINES

- Multiple opportunities for structured play, athletics, and use of equipment
- Features a climbing wall
- Mostly smooth walking surfaces

- Low impact on this sense

- Sound may echo in some areas, particularly the gym and cycle room
- Close proximity to other visitors engaging in a variety of activities

- Indoors/artificial lighting
- Some areas feature bright lights
- Multi-use areas, potential for close proximity to other visitors

- Some areas may have a noticeable scent of cleaning supplies or equipment such as rubber

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Conclusion

IBCCES has completed its review of various Gilbert Parks and Recreation facilities and community resources, finding it to be a generally welcoming environment for guests with special needs.

Overall, the locations were accommodating and welcoming for guests with varying needs. Staff were very interested in feedback, improvements, and additional accommodations.

It is evident Gilbert Parks and Recreation is dedicated to serving the community and providing more accessible resources for all.

Additional recommendations:

- Ensure the website also has a specific page (whether as part of the Accessibility page or standalone) discussing the CAC designation and why the organization has committed to this program.
 - The IBCCES team can assist with communicating and certification - the goal is to ensure guests understand what is offered and what their options are.
 - Ensure messaging about the great work the organization is doing to be more inclusive for visitors is periodically shared on social media or other marketing channels – this is part of your DNA and values, so ensure there is consistent messaging throughout the year/season.
- Consider working with local families or autistic adults to “secret shop” events or provide additional feedback on facilities to deepen understanding of needs and also inquire about future options or events they are looking for.
- Staff training and reminders
 - Participate in future webinars or other training programs so staff can learn from top autism and sensory experts and keep up to date on information and recommendations. This is part of the ongoing partnership IBCCES offers to all CACs to ensure the learning and growth process continues after certification!
 - IBCCES will supply employee communication card template to provide staff with a tangible daily reminder of their training, the meaning of the CAC, and the process your organization has completed, as well as serve as a “quick reference” guide for talking points. Recommend printing and providing in all staff areas.
- Consider hosting special events or partnering with additional local autism-related groups to further connect with the autism community locally.

- Ensure special events, concerts, festivals, and other public events are accommodating and temporary staff and vendors are informed about the desire for inclusion.
- Provide a one-sheet or landing page for all city vendors and partners to learn more about the initiative and how they can help.
- Consider creating and providing sensory kits at front desk of rec centers or other locations. These could include sensory toys, fidget items, noise canceling headphones or ear plugs, etc. These could be used in times when visitors need a distraction or soothing.
- Consider creating a “hotline” or dedicated email address for families with children on the spectrum to write in to a fully trained staff member with questions, concerns, or ideas.

Appendix

Environment

Provide smooth, wide pathways and surfaces to eliminate the feeling of crowding. In addition, smooth non-glare paving provides a proper surface for children with mobility issues and is important for children with ASD, many of whom are sensitive to textures and bright light. Provide a clear edge along pathways so that visually impaired persons are aware of the edge of the path surface. This also helps children with ASD distinguish changes in the environment and in walking surfaces, which can be difficult for sensory-sensitive children to identify.

Problems with fine motor skills involve a lack of control or coordination of the small muscle movements in the hands and fingers. A person who has a problem with fine motor skills may not be able to grip objects, tap their fingers individually, or control their fingers or hands.

In addition to the three core difficulties of ASD (social interaction, communication challenges and repetitive behaviors), children on the autism spectrum often have difficulties with posture, coordination and motor planning.

Factors that affect motor skills in children with autism:

- Differences in brain wiring - Affect sensorimotor integration, motor learning and coordination; Difficulties with prediction and anticipation; Affect motor planning and motor learning; Affect postural stability and balance.
- Joint hypermobility/low muscle tone - Affect stability and muscle strength; Associated with toe walking.
- Anxious/fearful temperament - Affects willingness to participate in challenging tasks.

Joint hypermobility affects the development of motor control in several ways. Because the joints are inherently less stable, more muscle work is needed for good posture and movement control. Children with joint hypermobility often have difficulty sitting erect in a chair or on a ride; may not be able to grip handrails, door handles, etc.; and experience leg weakness, which affect walking distances, running speed and managing stairs.

Some people with ASD find it difficult to have a sense of themselves in relation to the physical world around them. Rocking, swinging and balancing can help them gain a sense of self. Having too much room in front of them or behind them can cause anxiety if they need to have something directly behind them or in front of them to gain a sense of themselves. In addition, some people with autism experience anxiety if they cannot

see what is happening or where sounds are coming from, and they find this very disorientating.

SPACE

Many people with autism need space around them and feel overwhelmed by crowds or clutter. They can feel hemmed in by corridors and need to know there is a quick escape route. "It has been suggested that people with autism find it helpful if furniture is kept to the sides of a room and the central space is kept clear." (Nguyen, 2006)

When someone with Sensory Processing Disorder is surrounded by clutter, their brain has difficulty making sense of everything around them (too much sensory input: color, sound, visual "noise"). Those who haven't mastered self-control will respond with mentally shutting down or attempt to settle their mind by physical activity (this is considered "stimming", short for "self-stimulatory behavior"). To help them make sense of their surroundings and bring calm and order into their mind, minimalism can help those with special/sensory needs and sensory processing issues. In indoor spaces, removing all but the necessities can help calm the mind.

- Minimize the stress; surprises increase stress levels of people with ASD.
- Provide smooth, wide pathways and surfaces to eliminate the feeling of crowding. In addition, smooth non-glare paving provides a proper surface for children with mobility issues and is important for children with ASDs, many of whom are sensitive to textures and bright light.
- Provide transitions between spaces/activities to allow individuals to orient themselves before experiencing something new (for example, create a transition between a park pathway and the designated viewing area).
- Provide plenty of visual aids and signage. Some children with autism use a picture exchange system (PICT); approximately half of all children with ASD are nonverbal. Therefore, in designing outdoor environments, incorporating signage with clear, simple pictures to communicate ideas or intended use is very important.

COLOR

Science has shown that colors have an impact on mood, and color has a long history of therapeutic use (Winthrow, 2004). In general, bright colors are exciting, and soft colors are calming. However, the effect of certain colors on ASD children can vary, and trial and error with multiple colors may be necessary to determine the color that is right for any individual child. In addition, the effect of color can wear off after a person is in a space for an extended period. Generally, the rule of thumb regarding the impact and properties of color is as follows:

- Red: Stimulates the mind, increases circulation and appetite
- Blue: Calming, reduces blood pressure

- Bright yellow: Reflects light, can overstimulate
- Pale yellow: Calming
- Green: Soothing, associated with nature and creativity
- Orange: Can overstimulate and agitate
- Light pink or rose: Soothing

All children can find it hard to filter out distractions sometimes, which makes it challenging for them to pay attention. Children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) can find it difficult to focus on things that don't interest them. In addition to sensory over-stimulation concerns, jewelry or clothing colors/patterns may also be a source of distraction for guests with ASD. Consequently, staff jewelry should be minimal, and uniforms should be free of/have minimal lace, buttons, zippers, patterns (swirls, dots, stripes), etc.

LIGHTING

Eye sensitivities include sensitivity to any kind of light, especially fluorescent, as well as certain colors and patterns. Individuals with sensory sensitivities may experience:

- Discomfort from fluorescent light, sunlight, bright lights, glare, lights at night.
- Difficulties with bright shiny surfaces and problems with sharp contrast, such as bright colors in clothes and displays, busy patterns such as stripes, polka dots, and swirls in displays, wallpaper and carpets.

We now know that fluorescent lights can be distracting to the point of debilitating for some people because they can see the lights flickering at 60 flashes per second (60Hz). Some fluorescent lights have a flicker rate of 120 Hz.

Recommended indoor lighting for sensory rooms include calm rhythmic lighting and fluorescent light filters. Calming rhythmic light options: bubble tube mirror lights, fiber optic lights, jellyfish lamps.

Extensive use of natural light has drawbacks for people with ASD. A dazzling sun entrance, deep shadows or excessive contrasts, patterned or rhythmic shadow-light sequences, etc., may produce visual overstimulation. When creating quiet rooms/sensory areas, sandblasted – or otherwise similarly treated – glass generates a convenient diffuse and homogeneous illumination out from natural light. Also, the precise design and placing of windows determines the way natural light is distributed in a room or building. Skylights, for example, can also help to achieve this kind of diffuse lighting in quiet areas.

SCENT

While strong odors can be annoying to neurotypical individuals, many autistic children are particularly sensitive from a variety of materials that they can be exposed to in their living environment. Because children are strongly affected by the quality of the air they breathe in any setting, elimination of odors and toxic exposures is an important goal for the ASD environment.

Major triggers include irritants such as paints, cleaning agents, pesticides, as well as building materials such as sealants, plastics, adhesives, and insulation materials. In recent years, efforts to design tighter and more energy-efficient buildings have resulted in an increase in indoor pollution levels and declining indoor air quality.

It is important to employees to use toxin-free personal care products. Additional triggers can include perfumes (both personal from toiletries and from deodorizers), animal and insect allergens, environmental tobacco smoke, and molds. Other steps that can be taken to eliminate toxic odors and otherwise detoxify the environment include testing and treating the building for radon gas; properly waterproofing foundations and providing a protective barrier such as a “slush slab” (two inches of concrete topping over the gravel and soil) in crawl space areas to reduce the possibility of mold and mildew; regularly changing the filter on building heating and air conditioning system to minimize exposure to dust and pollen; and possibly using an electronic air filter.

SOUND

Many people on the autism spectrum appear to sense the world differently than other people. Some seem to be hypersensitive and some appear to be hyposensitive. They misinterpret everyday sensory information, such as touch, sound, and movement. They also indicate that they can hear sounds at many decibels above those others can hear. They can hear sounds that are a lot further away and the intensity of sounds can be deafening. They can be listening to rock music on high volume and still hear a conversation in the room next door.

A sensory guide is recommended to help guests identify rides, parades and other events that may have higher noise levels. The guide can also assist in identifying attractions that may have sounds (like buzzing and humming) that may impact guests with autism.

When developing quiet rooms/sensory areas, carpet and pads are the most effective way to reduce impact of external noise. This dissipates the impact energy before it has a chance to enter the building structure as sound. Carpeting gives superb results and often resolves the problem of impact noise. Note, however, that it does little to mitigate airborne sound such as voices, music, etc.; so, if those noise sources are part of the problem as well, you will need to implement additional safeguards. Those safeguards could include covers for electrical outlets and vents; affixing seals to all doors; installing soundproof insulation in walls and between ceiling joints.

Questions to consider: Are there regular external sounds, such as crowds, rides or building construction? Are there regular internal sounds, such as clocks ticking, music? Is it possible to reduce external sounds from permeating to the inside? Is there a way of reducing sounds for everyone, such as earplugs?

ENVIRONMENT

Proprioceptive receptors are in the joints and ligaments, allowing for motor control and posture. The proprioceptive system tells the brain where the body is in relation to other objects and how to move. Those who are hyposensitive crave input; they love jumping, bumping and crashing activities, as well as deep pressure such as that provided by tight bear hugs.

The vestibular receptors, located in the inner ear, tell the brain where the body is in space by providing the information related to movement and head position. These are key elements of balance and coordination, among other things.

Those with hyposensitivity are in constant motion. They crave fast, spinning and/or intense movement, which can be experienced on some rides, and love being tossed in the air and jumping on trampolines, nets, etc.

Those who are hypersensitive may be fearful of activities that require good balance, including climbing on playground equipment, riding a bike, or balancing on one foot, especially with their eyes closed. They, too, may appear clumsy.

If they're hypersensitive, they have difficulty understanding where their body is in relation to other objects and may bump into things and appear clumsy; because they have trouble sensing the amount of force they're applying, they may rip the paper when erasing, pinch too hard or slam objects down.

COMMUNICATION

Place visual labels (symbols, photos, words, textures) on functional items, rooms, cabinets, drawers, bins, closets and anything that has relevance for the child. In a well-labeled environment, a child with ASD may better understand what is expected and be less likely to engage in undesirable behaviors. In addition, if the child understands the function of an item (e.g., a piece of furniture), he/she is more likely to use it for its intended purpose. For example, if visual labels for sleeping are placed on the bedroom door, the child may be more likely to associate the bedroom with sleep.

Use dividers, tape boundaries, and signs as needed for setting expectations and limits. For example, the use of STOP signs on doors, drawers, furniture and appliances has helped some children understand that these items/ areas are off-limits. For children who climb on high surfaces or enter areas they should not, STOP signs will let them know what they are doing is dangerous. Using colored tape to designate boundaries on

carpets, floors or walls can help to visually remind children where their bodies need to remain.

Clear signs should be placed in front of each attraction, facility, area in outdoor spaces.

Many people with an ASD are thought to be visual learners, so presenting information in a visual way can help to encourage and support communication, language development and ability to process information. It can also promote independence, build confidence and raise self-esteem.

You can take simple steps in all environments to help persons with an ASD to orientate themselves and carry out day-to-day tasks with a greater level of understanding. For example:

- Label objects, items and areas clearly.
- Place visual markers on floors or other surfaces to “map out” specific areas. Use pictures or real objects, e.g., spoon = dining facility; train = train ride.
- Use different textures or colors. For example, a white tablecloth on a table could mean it’s dinner time; a blue sign could indicate a dining facility; a green sign could indicate a park ride.
- Keep visible lists of safety rules and policy reminders.

The ability of children with ASD to communicate and use language depends on their intellectual and social development. Some children with ASD may not be able to communicate using speech or language, and some may have very limited speaking skills. Others may have rich vocabularies and be able to talk about specific subjects in detail. Many have problems with the meaning and rhythm of words and sentences. They also may be unable to understand body language and the meanings of different vocal tones. Taken together, these difficulties affect the ability of children with ASD to interact with others, especially people their own age.

As we are growing with the field of technology, we are realizing more and more that our children are benefiting from the use of these new and innovative tools that are being marketed. Even with some of the basic (but crucial) skill development for children with Autism, the iPad can be a fantastic tool in helping with bridging the gap. The iPad can be invaluable in learning to communicate. Studies show that the interactive nature of tablets can help kids begin the process of learning language at an earlier age than observation and other teaching methods.

As with any form of childhood education, interaction is very important. Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) apps, especially those that use symbols or images for speech, can be life changers for those with verbal challenges. These apps can literally give speech to those that do not have it and provide invaluable assistance to those on the path to speech.

Yale researchers have for the first time used functional MRI to study brain organization in persons with autism and Asperger Syndrome and found that they perceive faces as if they were objects.

Autism and a closely related condition, Asperger Syndrome, are characterized by impairments in social functioning and interactions. Difficulty recognizing other people by their faces is also one of the characteristics of these disorders. To assist your guests in recognizing staff or unfamiliar people, photographs should be provided to help identify staff whom the guests may encounter. Photos of staff uniforms – with descriptions of the associated job functions - should also be included on the company's website and in any pre-travel communications (for example, special/sensory videos designed for families with sensory needs).

SCHEDULE

Many individuals with autism rely on rules and routines to keep their environment predictable and, therefore, feel safer. Staff must understand the importance of rules and routines for individuals with autism and apply them in various settings and situations. Application of rules and routines in different settings helps students with autism engage more successfully in activities and prevents problem behavior. Routines help create an efficient environment and save time.

For most individuals with autism, especially those who have limited skills in communication and other adaptive functioning, rules and routines must be directly taught or explained. For instance, an activity schedule consisting of a set of pictures or words provides visual cues and helps the individual know the sequence of activities.

SENSORY

Create opportunities for sensory stimulation. You can do this by looking at bubble lamps, smelling essential oils, listening to music, playing on the sand, using sensory toys, massages, or swinging on a swing, to name a few examples. Challenging behavior can often be defused by an activity that releases energy or pent-up anger or anxiety. This might be punching a punch bag, bouncing on a trampoline, swimming, or running around the garden.

Without question, anxiety is a severe problem for many people on the autism spectrum. We hear this from parents, teachers and doctors, as well as from adolescents and adults with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). This disabling anxiety can take the form of one or more disorders, including panic disorder and phobias. A recent review of scientific studies on autism and anxiety revealed that we have no clear gauge of how commonly anxiety disorders overlap with autism. A few small, relatively short-term studies have produced starkly different results: from 11 percent to 84 percent. (For comparison, the prevalence of anxiety disorders among the general population is about 18 percent.)

Pressure can help to relieve anxiety by regulating the sensory system when it is overstimulated. Compression or sensory tools to consider include snug vests and weighted blankets. These items work by providing input to the deep pressure touch receptors throughout the body. The result of applying pressure has a relaxing and calming effect. Firm pressure to the torso can help individuals with anxiety and hyperactivity disorders increase focus and attention. Pressure can diminish anxiety symptoms such as tantrums, self-injury, and self-stimming/repetitive body movement behaviors.

TASTE/GUSTATORY

Food overlaps with many aspects of life that challenge the coping skills of individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). These can include extreme sensitivity to change and sensory stimuli, as well as an intense focus on details.

For instance, many children and adults on the spectrum are extremely sensitive to not just flavor, but also the color, smell and texture of foods. Many also have strong preferences for a narrow selection of foods. Some even feel compelled to have certain foods in the same place on the plate or to use the same plate at each meal.

The “feel” or touch of the food is commonly a sensory factor for individuals with an autism spectrum disorder. The temperature or texture of foods needs to be just “right.” It is common for children to insist on all foods being at room temperature. This may mean that cold foods such as ice cream or popsicles are not tolerated and that foods that are cooked need to be cooled to room temperature before the child will eat them. It is also common for children with autism spectrum disorders to have a strong preference for one texture of foods, such as crunchy or smooth.

Some children with an autism spectrum disorder are much more affected by the smell of food. The smell of foods that are not familiar and comfortable may affect their ability to eat. This may affect their ability to go places outside of their home to eat. Some extremely sensitive individuals may not be able to eat at the same table or in the same room where others are eating a food that has an uncomfortable and/or unfamiliar smell.

Children with autism frequently have problems with eating including obsessive placing of food on their plates; for example, distinct types of food cannot touch each other. The preference for foods may relate to the child’s behavior in other areas such as repetitive behaviors of lining up or collecting, or aversion to certain textures. Resistance to change in routine is often encountered in children with autism so when you think about this in relation to food, it may account for the child wanting to continually eat the same thing or have food arranged a certain way.

The taste buds on our tongues are divided into four groups: sweet, sour, bitter or salty. Sometimes an autistic child may only eat foods from one of these categories. In other cases, most foods may be tolerable but only with liberal doses of a sauce or condiment covering everything. This may be accepted by parents if it is the only way to ensure a breadth of diet.

This tendency toward selectivity and routine can cross over into other areas. Some children will only eat foods of a certain color, or food can only be eaten if it is from a favorite container or plate. When there are so many possible 'invisible' causes, a child's refusal to eat can easily be interpreted as willful misbehavior.

Many parents of children with autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) report that behavior improves when their children eat a diet free of the proteins gluten and casein. Gluten is found primarily in wheat, barley and rye; casein, in dairy products.

When most of us think of food allergies we think of an "IgE" (immunoglobulin E) response – those that create an almost immediate reaction after eating a problem food. Symptoms include rashes, nasal congestion, coughing, wheezing, closing of the throat, and GI problems from slight nausea to diarrhea. In extreme cases anaphylaxis can occur. Less commonly understood are "IgG" (immunoglobulin G) responses, which can take up to 72 hours to appear. Identifying food sensitivities and removing all potential allergens to minimize challenges to the immune system has been proven to be helpful for many children.

Another problem related to casein and gluten must do with incomplete digestion, which leads to uptake of possibly harmful peptides (pieces of casein or gluten protein). While not causing a true allergic response, such peptides can lead to behavioral problems.

With autism, there may be other food reactions as well. An example is intolerance to grains, fruits, and vegetables that contain complex sugars of diverse types. When this occurs it usually is a problem with carbohydrate digestion, leaving undigested sugars in the intestinal tract. Abnormal gut flora can then flourish and cause an inflammatory condition.

A recent [review of scientific studies](#) found that children with autism are five times more likely to have mealtime challenges such as extremely narrow food selections, ritualistic eating behaviors (e.g. no foods can touch) and meal-related tantrums. Planning helps to avoid problem foods or textures is a necessary component of meal services.

ESCAPE

An individual with autism may react to feeling overwhelmed by fleeing. They may be headed away from something that is upsetting or seeking a place or sensation that will calm their system. This fight-or-flight response is why someone with sensory difficulties will shut down, escape the situation quickly, or become aggressive when in sensory overload.

Be sure to incorporate "quiet rooms" within the building, which are spaces where a family can retreat when a child begins to get overwhelmed. Ideally, they should be located throughout the building so a family doesn't have to go a long distance to find one.

Create a soothing area where the person with autism can escape when they become overwhelmed – or where they can watch the activities at a distance until they are comfortable enough to participate.

A healthy sensory environment provides opportunities for movement, stimulation and lack of stimulation. Every person has different sensory needs and levels of tolerance. Soft, natural lighting is better for mood and attention than artificial lighting; pillows on soft furniture and quilts on walls absorb and soften sounds. Research has repeatedly found associations between color and mood – for example, some shades of blue may help with creativity and calmness.

It may be advantageous to have one area of the establishment filled with bright colors and activities that the family enjoys, including a television and stereo, and another area of the home with blank walls, soft colors, soft textures and quiet activities such as books or puzzles.

Exercise, vestibular input and proprioceptive input are also key to an autistic lifestyle, so space must be made for these as well. If space is limited, a balance board or mini-trampoline can be stored in a closet and brought out when necessary.

AWARENESS

Individuals with autism can exhibit a wide range of characteristics. Some people are mildly impaired by their symptoms, while others are severely disabled. Treatments and services can improve a person's symptoms and ability to function, allowing them (and their families) to enjoy greater inclusion in a neuro-typical society. As awareness increases and our understanding of ASD improves, staying up to date with the latest information is crucial to managing symptoms and providing a positive experience for individuals with autism and their families.

Children with autism are known to wander or elope at a rate nearly four times higher than children without autism. Make sure to discuss with parents their child's wandering history and learn any triggers or obsessions. If a child wanders from your establishment, you should call 911 IMMEDIATELY and notify parents of any wandering incidents. Ensure that fences are gated, and exterior doors are shut.

It is important to place locks and alarms on exterior doors and windows. This may prevent the child from leaving, or at the very least notify staff if a child attempts to open a potential exit route.

Secure items that are dangerous if ingested, such as detergents, chemicals, cleaning supplies, pesticides, medications and small items a child might mouth or chew. It is easy for an individual with autism to confuse a bottle of yellow cleaning fluid with juice based on appearance or to pour/spill liquids (some of which may be poisonous or toxic) out of a bottle.

Elopement - Nearly 50% of children with ASD engaged in elopement (wandering) behavior:

- ↑ risk for bodily harm
- Suffocation
- Drowning
- Motor vehicle accidents

Drowning: 91% of wandering related deaths in the last three years were a result of accidental drowning. Youth with autism in your care should know how to swim if there is an ungated pool or body of water near your activities. Make sure that youth with autism are properly supervised around water.

CREATING A SAFE SPACE

You can create a non-distracting and functional area by thinking about the physical structure of a room or environment. Use carefully chosen furniture, soft furnishings, and flooring to create a calm space.

Labeling items can also be helpful. For example, a kitchen will usually have fitted cabinets and fixtures as standard, helping to identify it, but all areas of the kitchen could also be labeled with words and symbols to help someone use the room and the equipment with minimal support. Cupboards which contain food or hazardous materials should be locked when not in use.

Here are some other things to consider.

Color and patterns

It is generally accepted that low-arousal colors such as cream (not yellow or white) should be used for walls and patterned wallpaper should be avoided. Soft furnishings should also be kept fairly plain. Single-color, painted walls can also eliminate the possibility of wallpaper being removed. Patterned floors can be confusing to walk across and may increase anxiety or cause people to become fixated.

Lighting

Fluorescent or harsh lighting can hurt the eyes of a person with autism. Many say that they can see these types of lights flickering or hear them hum. These sensations can be distracting. Due to these difficulties, it is best to use soft lighting where possible. Adjustable lighting in some rooms can be calming.

Curtains and Blinds

It has been suggested that it's best to avoid using slatted blinds, particularly vertical ones, as these can be distracting. Curtains may be a better option, with blackout curtains helping someone who is particularly sensitive to light. If someone has a tendency to pull on curtain rods, use Velcro to hold up the curtains. Plastic stick-on coverings can also be placed on windows, giving privacy while letting some light in.

Noise

Some people with autism can't filter out noises that other people simply block out or ignore. Certain furnishings can help to reduce noise levels. For example, carpet or soft flooring is quieter than laminate flooring, which can be noisy. This type of furnishing can also create a feeling of coziness and safety.

Smells

People on the autism spectrum can become overwhelmed by subtle smells that you may not notice, such as someone's deodorant or perfume, or the scent of some fabrics. We suggest using a background fragrance to block the intrusion of uncontrollable smells.

Safety

Some people with autism can have little or no awareness of danger, meaning that you may need to take special precautions with everyday objects.

Here are some things you could try:

- Locks or high handles on cabinets
- Having electrical sockets outside of bedrooms or locked in a cupboard
- Using plug locks
- Having radiator covers
- Adjust your water temperature so it's not too hot
- Preparing for the possibility that a person with autism may run away or wander.

Parents could try a GPS [tracker](#) for their child, while adults may want to carry an [autism alert card](#).

Sensory rooms

Sensory rooms are a good way to create a relaxing, calm, and yet stimulating environment.

Equipment can include:

- Projection equipment
- Fiber optics
- Bubble tubes
- Mirror balls
- Sound system to produce soothing music
- Beanbags

If you don't have the money or the space to have a sensory room, try creating a sensory corner with a seat that is screened off from the room.

We suggest creating a sensory bag or sensory basket, containing a selection of sensory items that can travel around with a person with autism.

This could include:

- Stress balls
- A whistle with the ball removed for hard blowing
- Scented lotions

Creating Spaces for Individuals with Autism: Advice from Autism Experts

Simon Humphreys explains how to adapt your environment for people with autism.

He says, "As an architect, I specialise in designing for autism. My work is informed by my late brother, who was autistic. I practice architecture and lecture on autism and architecture.

"Due to the distinct way people with autism perceive their environment and process incoming information, they make sense of their world in a unique way." (de Roeck, 1997)

"I have developed some overarching concepts that can inform the creation of spaces and buildings that respond to this unique perception and provide the initial backdrop for autism-friendly spaces and environments." (Simon Humphreys)

Calm and Order

“People with autism are bombarded with sensory stimuli. They perceive everything without filtration and selection. This leads to the perception of the whole scene as one single entity with all the details perceived but not processed simultaneously.”

Bogdashina, 2011

Create a space that provides low arousal and is calming. Such a design will provide a backdrop for the introduction of stimuli which will assist in understanding.

Clarity and Simplicity

“For children with autism to recognise things, these things must be exactly the same as when they initially experienced them; only then will they know what to do.” Donna Williams

Design clear simple solutions for spaces. Complexity can cause anxiety in the autistic mind. It should be understandable and easy to absorb. Spaces should have rhythm and fixed orientation points and accommodate routine and structure.

The Senses

“Noise and confusion at large gatherings of people overwhelmed my senses.” Temple Grandin

“Every touching experience of architecture is multisensory.” Pallasmaa

Spaces need to address each sense on an equal basis. Consider smell, touch, taste, and sound at the same level as sight. Sight is usually the most dominant and fixed sense, but this is not always the case with autism.

Proxemics

Proxemics is the measure of personal space around one’s body. For people on the autism spectrum, it is much greater than it is for others. Design spaces and buildings that have larger spaces than normal.

Movement

Moving around a building raises all kinds of stimuli, transitional moments, and thresholds for people on the autism spectrum. Design spaces that allow for easy, non-confrontational movement and reduce as many physical barriers, doors, and thresholds as possible.

Observation

“All of us need a private space. Autistic children need their secret places, too, in which they can hide and retreat to their own world. After all, autism is a withinness disability, and autistic children need the security of their own hideaways. I had mine; it was a place for me to think and recharge myself.” Temple Grandin

Try to create spaces both inside and outside that allow for the above, but also provide staff with the knowledge that it is safe and secure and allow discreet observation.