



CREATING SENSORY-FRIENDLY EVENTS

Thanks for caring about autistic and neurodivergent individuals and their families in your community.

The Public Health Agency of Canada reports one in 50 Canadians are autistic. A staggering number that continues to grow.

Autism Home Base is a community of autistic adults and their family members with lived-experience.

For us, accessibility barriers are most closely linked to community understanding of our communication styles and behaviours and the very real need for sensory accommodations and relief.

Your community can be more welcoming to these valued community members through staff training, adaptive program offerings, use of sector-friendly language and symbols, and by creating sensory-friendly spaces at your events and facilities.



WHY CREATE A SENSORY-FRIENDLY SPACE

Autistic and neurodivergent individuals can become overwhelmed in busy, crowded, and noisy environments. It's extremely challenging to self-regulate emotional responses.

Having a safe, quiet place to decompress can make a huge difference in their ability to successfully participate in community events and programs.

A combination of factors contribute to feeling overwhelmed, over-stimulated or anxious so it can be difficult to predict specific triggers.

Everyone is different so spaces are equipped with a variety of sensory tools to accommodate various needs.

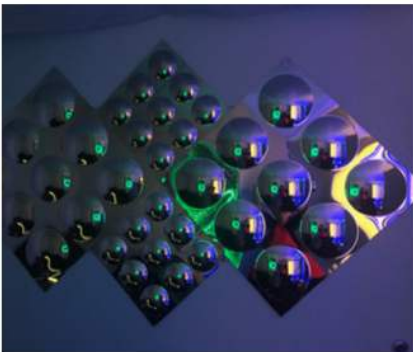
Assume your constituents include neurodivergent community members and proactively plan for their inclusion. By providing a sensory-friendly space, you are setting a standard for inclusivity and sending a strong message ... Autistic individuals and their families are valued community members.



CREATING YOUR SENSORY SPACE

- Is this a pop-up offered during festivals? Or a designated space in your library, community centre or recreation complex?
- Is there a need to limit # of visits or length of time for visits? Preferably NO. Let the user decide how they use the space.
- Clearly communicate availability and any specific user protocols. Consistency is critical. There's nothing worse than running for cover only to find it closed.
- Location is important. Is it close to food and washrooms? Is it close enough to access other activities and not feel isolated? Ensure the location is not too loud (away from sound systems or generators).
- Create welcoming signage. Language is key and sets the tone:
ie: Come on in and take a sensory break!
- Ensure staff or volunteers understand the intention of the space. Provide training that encourages flexibility – staff are there to provide accommodations! Empower staff to use their discretion to be as accommodating as possible within safety and comfort standards.
- Staff/volunteers will be responsible for cleaning protocols. Consider wipeable/easily cleanable items. You can ask users to remove shoes, but be aware this may not be an option for some who are hypertactile.
- Autism doesn't end in childhood. Ensure your space, furniture and sensory items are adult sized too.
- Evaluate your sensory-friendly space and get feedback from users so you can update tools and terms for next time. What did they like? What would they recommend changing or adding?

WHAT TO INCLUDE



Every autistic person is different so options are important. Some may be sensory-seeking and others may be sensory-avoidant. Some individuals may seek stimulation like bright visuals and lively music, while others may seek quiet spaces, and a break from lights or activity to help them self-regulate. Offer a variety of items for participants to choose from.

Options for your space include:

- dimmable or controlled lighting
- a hard chair option such as a cube
- seating that offers movement (wobbly or rocking chair)
- bean bag or other soft seating option
- fibre optic strands (battery operated if the space does not have power)
- reflective surfaces (plastic mirrors) or reflective safety blankets which also make a great crinkling noise
- for permanent spaces consider interactive bubble tubes or wall panels (avoid strobe lights due to seizure triggers)
- fidget items (hard and soft), such as stress/squishy balls, pop-its or spinners
- visual stims such as a sand timer or glow sticks
- size adjustable headphones for all ages
- foam ear plugs (disposable)
- inexpensive sunglasses
- eye/sleeping masks
- a variety of music options that can be switched or easily turned off

USING THE SPACE

- Participants of all ages and abilities can benefit from a sensory-friendly space, so will their families.
- Family and friends can also support and participate.
- Participants will self-identify if they need a sensory break, some autistic and neurodivergent individuals may not be interested, it is a personal preference.
- Help raise awareness by explaining why you are offering a sensory-friendly space - spread the word to encourage others to follow suit at other events/programs. Your advocacy will help make sensory-friendly spaces a commonly available resource.

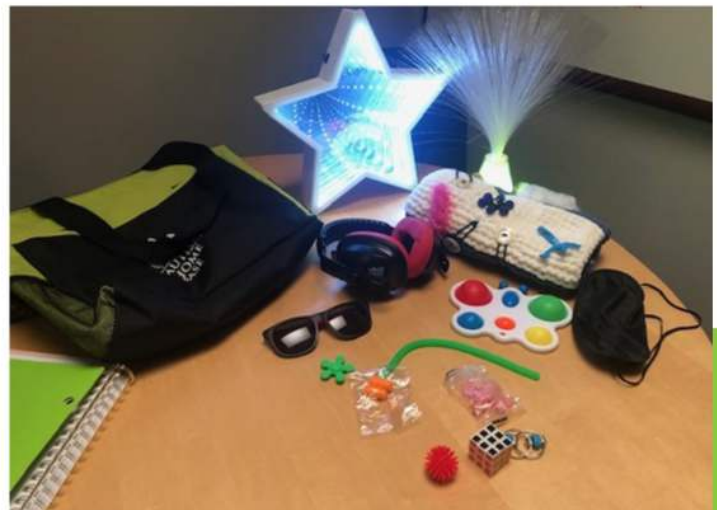


GOOD LUCK IN CREATING YOUR SENSORY-FRIENDLY SPACE! PLEASE SHARE YOUR PHOTOS AND EXPERIENCE. WE WOULD LOVE TO HEAR HOW THINGS GO, SO WE CAN CONTINUE TO SHARE AND LEARN FROM EACH OTHER!

SENSORY KITS FOR LOAN

Sensory-friendly kits are another great option for your program or event. They are portable so users can take them into your facility or event and participate more fully.

Consider having kits for participants to sign out with items such as headphones, fidget toys, ear plugs, plastic sunglasses.



ABOUT AUTISM HOME BASE

We are autistic adults across the spectrum and their friends and family who work together to organize social and recreational activities, share resources, build friendships, network, and strategize.

Our fun, interactive meet-ups create opportunities to build lifelong relationships, expand our networks, and develop new skills and interests. We offer activities 7 days a week via Zoom and at our community hub.



ASK ABOUT OUR TRAINING

The 'Lived Experience Autism Perspective' (LEAP) training is a 90-minute interactive discussion designed to support your team's understanding and service provision to neurodivergent community members. Let us help your team:

- Demystify autism
- Brainstorm strategies
- Develop inclusive solutions



Developed by The Sinneave Family Foundation in collaboration with autistic self-advocates, LEAP will help you create and foster environments where everyone can thrive.

Learn more at autismhomebase.com/LEAP_workshops/

**FOR ADVICE PLANNING YOUR SENSORY-FRIENDLY SPACE OR
INCLUSIVE PROGRAM OFFERINGS, EMAIL [KELLY@AUTISMHOMEBASE.COM](mailto:kelly@autismhomebase.com)
TO BOOK A PRIVATE CONSULTATION.**



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