



# Architecture, Multi-Sensory Spaces, & Havens

# Sensory Sensitivity

- Autistic individuals are not the only ones who experience sensory overload in their everyday life
- 10-15% of typically developing school children have sensory challenges
- About 90% of autistic individuals have sensory differences

## 2 Types of Autism Architecture

1. Permanent building or structure that is designed with features to support the everyday lives of autistic individuals
  
1. Multi-sensory environment (MSE): furnished space inside a building that may or may not be permanent

# MSE

- Offers multisensory input with a heavy emphasis on vestibular, proprioceptive, and tactile stimulation that is known to promote internal organization
- Usually includes auditory and visual input
- The personality of a MSE varies - some are designed to fire up visitors while others are for calming visitors down

# Autism Friendly Environments

- 7 unique principles behind creating autism friendly environments
  - Acoustics, spatial sequencing, escape, compartmentalization, transition spaces, sensory zoning, and safety
- Sensory neutral *escape space* that offers an opportunity for the user to self-regulate or relax
- Focus on creating zones within a structure to accommodate different needs which impact behavior and level of function

# Sensory Havens

- Portable or temporary sensory space
- Usually set up in conjunction with events that are attended by many people, some who are autistic
- Both excitement and anxiety may accompany events
- It's never a goal to treat or do therapy with people in a special event sensory haven, but it is a goal to **provide them with an opportunity to relax or settle down if they need or want it**

# Sensory Havens

- The structure itself is a series of cardboard houses, pop up tents, or portable cabanas
- Flooring is frequently a series of interlocking foam tiles
- Ambience is created by LED lighting arrays, white noise machines, and calming objects
- Most of these items also have the benefit of being easy to clean and lightweight to transport

# Final Takeaways

- Sensory havens are an invaluable addition to many community events
- **Can increase the staying power of autistic visitors by providing them with an opportunity to stay centered and calm**
- Families also experience a break and time to regroup
- The ripple effect can be seen in other visitors and event staff





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