Architecture, Multi-Sensory Spaces, & Havens

www.PlanningforAutism.com
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

www.PlanningforAutism.com
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

www.PlanningforAutism.com
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**

www.PlanningforAutism.com
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

www.PlanningforAutism.com
Our thanks to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board for their support.

Dr. Tina Fletcher, Alicia Chen, Ashlee Norris, Edgar Pizarro, Jason Tran, Megan Tripp

www.PlanningforAutism.com