



Occupational Therapists and Community
Partners:
Working Together to Welcome
Autistic Individuals

Overview

Learning Objectives

After reviewing this powerpoint, you should be able to,

- Explore how perceptions of autism have changed over time
- Address social and environmental factors before, during, and after special events

What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?

- Defined by **differences in communication and social skills, and differing perception of the senses** around each of us
- A difference to be celebrated
- Autism can be experienced in many different ways
- Examples
 - Some autistic individuals might rely on images to communicate
 - Some autistic individuals might get easily bothered by noises that others don't notice

Planning for Autism Events

- Creating welcoming events for autistic individuals can be a daunting task
- It is important to familiarize yourself with what makes their experience different from neurotypical visitors
- Autistic people report being able to stay longer and enjoy events more when there are supports for communication, sensory, and social differences
- Autism supports can be beneficial to all people
- Occupational therapists can be beneficial in helping community venues support individuals with differences and disabilities

Autism Supports

Community venues can put plans in place **before** autistic individuals visit

- Doing an autism-friendliness audit- checking for communication, social, and sensory supports
- Mapping an autism-friendly route
- Educating staff and volunteers
- Enlisting occupational therapists and students to help
- Posting information on the internet such as etiquette, rules, expectations, and success stories

Autism Supports

Supports can be put into place for people to use **during** visits

- Providing special ways for autistic visitors to check in
- Using signage that has a variety of ways of communicating, such as photos and icons
- Creating temporary or permanent sensory havens
- Designing autism-friendly activity stations

Autism Supports

Even **after** the visit, there are ways to learn from visitors

- Using visitor feedback to develop future events
- Writing visit summaries of successes and needs for improvement
- Writing grant applications seeking funding for future plans

Final Takeaways

- Planning for autism is an **ongoing process** that relies on **teamwork**, hearing **multiple points of view**, and being **willing to discard old ideas while inventing new ones**.
- Community partners should celebrate their efforts, continue their collaborations, and stay informed on the latest trends in autism research and activities.



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

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