

Hosting an autism-friendly event

Autism-friendly events open doors to new opportunities for families affected by autism and other special needs. With some simple accommodations, you can give families an experience that they've never had or may have found challenging. Thank you for your support of the autism community. Your efforts play a vital role in creating greater understanding and acceptance of people with autism.

Why might your event be difficult for a person with autism?

Autism, or autism spectrum disorder (ASD), refers to a broad range of conditions characterized by challenges with social skills, repetitive behaviors, speech and nonverbal communication. Here are three reasons why your event can present challenges for a person:

1. Sensory differences

Loud sounds, flashing lights and crowded and unfamiliar spaces can be extremely challenging to a child or adult with autism.

2. Preference for routine and predictability

Many people with autism function best when their environments are predictable and routine. Crowds and long lines, leading to uncertainty and discomfort for someone with ASD.

3. Managing community challenges

Families affected by autism may choose not to go to an event to avoid having to explain a child's behavior in public. Unusual behaviors often are a sign that an autistic person is excited about or is working hard to be in a certain place or situation. People who don't know about autism often misunderstand and wrongly judge these behaviors.

What can you do to make the event "autism-friendly"?

Providing accommodations to help support individuals with autism and their families at an event is simple and can make all the difference for an enjoyable outing. Here's what you can do:

1. Support sensory differences

- Designate a section for attendees with autism and their families. A separate section allows you to make sensory modifications, like dimmer lights and reduced volume, in one area while leaving the rest of the space as-is.
- Have a quiet room where people can go if they are feeling overwhelmed. Quiet rooms can include calming activities like coloring; calming items like yoga balls; and comfortable seating like bean bag chairs.

2. Promote routine and predictability

- Use visuals – like maps, arrows, signs and photos – throughout the event space to help support visitors with autism.

3. Create an inclusive environment

- Announce that the event is autism-friendly so that attendees and employees are aware of the supports available for individuals with autism and their families.
- Provide training for staff on best practices to support people with autism. Autism Speaks can provide training resources.

We're here to help.

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