

Becoming an autism-friendly hotel

Autism-friendly environments open doors to new opportunities for families living with autism and other special needs. With some simple accommodations, you can give families a hotel stay 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 a hotel be a difficult place 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 a hotel stay can present challenges for a person with autism:

1. Sensory differences

Loud sounds, flashing lights and crowded and unfamiliar spaces can be 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. Differences from their usual environment such as crowds and long lines can lead to uncertainty and discomfort for someone with ASD.

3. Managing community challenges

Families affected by autism may choose not to stay in a hotel 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 your hotel "autism-friendly"?

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

1. Support sensory differences

- Designate an area of the hotel for guests with autism and their families. This allows you to make sensory modifications, like dimmer lights, minimal decor and reduced volume, in one area while leaving the rest of the hotel as is.
- If you have a large lobby or other large rooms or meeting areas, 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. Support communication differences

- Provide pictures and detailed schedules in advance so guests can prepare for the new environment.
- Use visuals – like maps, arrows, signs and photos – throughout the hotel to help support guests with autism.

3. Create an inclusive environment

- Provide training for staff on best practices to support people with autism. Autism Speaks can provide training resources.
- Post signs or have staff wear pins that say that the hotel is autism-friendly. This can help make guests and employees aware of available supports.

We're here to help.