



# CREATING SENSORY-FRIENDLY SPACES



Thanks for caring about Autistic and neurodivergent individuals and their families in your community.

The Public Health Agency of Canada reports one in 50 Canadians are Autistic. A staggering number that continues to grow.

Autism Home Base is a community of Autistic adults and their family members with a lifetime of experience navigating people and spaces.

For us, accessibility barriers are most closely linked to community understanding and the very real need for accommodations and sensory relief.

Your operations can be more welcoming to these valued community members through staff training, adaptive program offerings, use of sector-friendly language and symbols, and by creating sensory-friendly spaces at your events and facilities.



## WHY CREATE A SENSORY-FRIENDLY SPACE

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Autistic and neurodivergent individuals can become overwhelmed in busy, crowded, and noisy environments. It can become extremely challenging to self-regulate our physical and emotional responses.

Having a safe, quiet place to decompress can make a huge difference in our ability to successfully participate in community events and programs.

A combination of factors contribute to feeling overwhelmed, over-stimulated or anxious, so it can be difficult to predict specific triggers.

Each of us is unique so we appreciate spaces that are equipped with a variety of tools and options that we can access easily whenever we need them.

You can safely assume your constituents include neurodivergent community members, so planning for their inclusion should be a priority. Your accessibility accommodations can help set the new standard for inclusion and send a strong message that Autistic individuals and their families are valued community members.



## CREATING YOUR SENSORY SPACE

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- Is this a limited time pop-up, offered during a festival? Or a designated permanent space in your library or community centre?
- Is there a need to limit # of visits or length of time for visits? Preferably NO. Let the user decide how they use the space.
- Clearly communicate availability and any specific user protocols. Consistency is critical. There's nothing worse than running for cover only to find it closed.
- Location is important. Is it close to food and washrooms? Is it close enough to access other activities and not feel isolated? Ensure the location is not too loud (away from sound systems or generators).
- Create welcoming signage. Language is key and sets the tone:  
ie: Come on in and take a sensory break!
- Ensure staff or volunteers understand the intention of the space. Provide training that encourages flexibility – staff are there to provide accommodations! Empower staff to use their discretion to be as accommodating as possible within safety and comfort standards.
- Staff/volunteers will be responsible for cleaning protocols. Consider wipeable/easily cleanable items. You can ask users to remove shoes, but be aware this may not be an option for some who are hypertactile.
- Autism doesn't end in childhood. Ensure your space, furniture and sensory items are adult-sized too.
- Evaluate your sensory-friendly space and get feedback from users so you can update tools and terms for next time. What did they like? What would they recommend changing or adding?

## WHAT TO INCLUDE

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Every Autistic person is different so options are important. Some may be sensory-seeking and others may be sensory-avoidant. Some individuals may seek stimulation like bright visuals and lively music, while others may seek quiet spaces, and a break from lights or activity to help them self-regulate. Offer a variety of items for participants to choose from.

Options for your space include:

- dimmable or controlled lighting
- a hard chair option
- seating that offers movement (wobble stool or rocking chair)
- bean bag or other soft seating option
- fibre optic strands (battery operated if the space does not have power)
- reflective surfaces (plastic mirrors) or reflective safety blankets which also make a great crinkling noise
- for permanent spaces consider interactive bubble tubes or wall panels (avoid strobe lights due to seizure triggers)
- fidget items (hard and soft), such as stress/squishy balls, pop-its or spinners
- visual stimulation such as sand timer or glow stick
- size adjustable headphones for all ages
- foam ear plugs (disposable)
- inexpensive sunglasses
- eye/sleeping masks
- a variety of music options that can be switched or easily turned up or off by the user



## USING THE SPACE

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Sensory-friendly kits are another great option for your program or event. They are portable so users can take them into your event and participate more fully.

Include items to calm or to focus sensory experiences such as: headphones or ear plugs, fidget items, eye coverings or sunglasses, foil blankets, water or snacks.



# ABOUT AUTISM HOME BASE

We are Autistic adults across the spectrum and their friends and families. We create and promote opportunities to build lifelong relationships, expand our supportive networks, and develop new skills and interests.

Our charity exists to combat the debilitating effects of social isolation that many Autistic individuals experience.



## ASK ABOUT OUR TRAINING AND E-LEARNING CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS

The 'Lived Experience Autism Perspective' (LEAP) training can help your team

- Demystify autism
- Brainstorm strategies
- Develop inclusive solutions

Learn more at [autismhomebase.com/LEAP\\_workshops/](https://autismhomebase.com/LEAP_workshops/)

**FOR ADVICE PLANNING YOUR SENSORY-FRIENDLY SPACE OR  
INCLUSIVE PROGRAM OFFERINGS, EMAIL [KELLY@AUTISMHOMEBASE.COM](mailto:kelly@autismhomebase.com)  
TO BOOK A PRIVATE CONSULTATION.**



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