

Hosting an AUTISM-FRIENDLY EVENT

Autism-friendly events open doors to new opportunities for families affected by autism and other special needs. Through some relatively simple accommodations, you can provide families the chance to experience an event that they may not have experienced before 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, refers to a broad range of conditions characterized by challenges with social skills, repetitive behaviors, speech and nonverbal communication. There are three reasons why your event might present challenges for a person:

1. Sensory Challenges

It is often said that people with autism see the world differently than their peers. Sounds, flashing lights and crowded and unfamiliar spaces can be extremely challenging to a child or adult with autism.

2. Need for Routine and Predictability

Many people with autism function best when their environments are predictable and routine. The excitement of doing something new can be offset by crowds and long waiting lines leading to uncertainty and discomfort.

3. Family's Fear of Judgment

Many families affected by autism may choose not to go on public outings for fear of disturbing others or being judged for the behavior of the person with autism. This fact alone may inhibit a family from attempting to attend an event.

What Can You Do to Make the Event "Autism-Friendly"?

Accommodations to help relieve the challenges presented by your event are relatively simple and can allow families in the autism community the chance to enjoy such an exciting occasion. Some suggestions include:

1. Addressing Sensory Challenges

- If possible, designate a section for attendees with autism and their families. A separate section allows you to make sensory modifications in one area, like dimmer lights and reduced volume, while leaving the remainder of the venue as is.
- Designate a "quiet room" where people can go if they are feeling overwhelmed. Quiet areas can include calming activities like coloring.

2. Addressing Routine/Predictability

- Use visuals throughout your venue to help support people with autism—such as maps, arrows, signage, photos, etc.
- If you have a refreshment or service area, designate a section or line for people with autism to reduce or eliminate wait time.

3. Addressing Fear of Judgment

- Make an announcement that this is an autism-friendly event, so that other attendees and employees are more understanding.
- Provide basic training for staff on best practices to support people with autism. Autism Speaks can provide training materials.