

Module 4

Creating a safe and inclusive environment



LEARNING OBJECTIVES



1. **Understand** people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) may view the world differently from others.
2. **Learn** how to build a more autism-friendly environment.
3. **Identify** some of the young people's needs with ASD in order to help them feel more comfortable and included.
4. **Distinguish** the negative effects of sensory differences.
5. **Adopt** general questions that we can ask ourselves on how to create a physical environment that will reduce anxieties.

How do you define inclusion?



Source: Inclusion & Inclusiveness. (2021, October 28). Edi Toolkit. <https://www.edi-toolkit.org/governance/check-out-some-basic-definitions/inclusion-inclusiveness/>

How do you define the term 'safe environment'?



Source: <https://inclusiveschools.org/a-safe-caring-school-environment/>

Individualised support is key

Everyone is different, so a strategy that works for one person may not necessarily work in the same way for another. This is why it is called '**Individualised Support**'. When considering strategies, it's important to remember that many people with Autism are:

- ▶ Visual Learners



'Visual information lasts longer and is more concrete than spoken and heard information'.

- ▶ Literal Thinkers



'**Literal**' means exactly what is said—the surface meaning. People with Autism tend to respond well when expectations or instructions are explicitly stated. **Figurative** is where people use language to create additional, or hidden, meanings—the deeper meaning. People with Autism often have trouble understanding idioms and 'reading between the lines' or pinpointing the 'hidden rules' in social situations'.

Source: Autism Support Strategies. (2022, January 28). Autism Association of Western Australia. <https://www.autism.org.au/what-is-autism/autism-support-strategies/>

What is environmental support?

*"Environmental support" is a general term used to **define the systematic use of explicit visual and/or social cues** to clarify meaning for children with autism.*

Environmental supports can serve as:

- ▶ *a compensatory means to structure and*
- ▶ *enhance language understanding, social engagement, and social-communicative interactions.*

The unique and atypical developmental patterns associated with autism provide the rationale for the use of two environmental supports: visually cued instruction and modified sociolinguistic input.

Source: Quill K. A. (1998). Environmental supports to enhance social-communication. *Seminars in speech and language*, 19(4), 407–424. <https://doi.org/10.1055/s-2008-1064057>

How can you create a safe and inclusive environment?

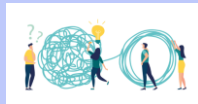
People with autism **deserve specific attention** as concern environmental comfort, well-being and accessibility of environments, not only because they are a significant and growing share of the total population, but also because **they can show special sensitiveness** to the variation and value of several environmental parameters.

Think about the ways that you can create a unique experience for them.....

Source: Zaniboni, L. (n.d.). Comfortable and safe environments for people with autism: preliminary analysis of risks and definition of priorities in the design phase. IOPscience.
<https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1742-6596/2069/1/012177/meta>

Firstly, think about the Challenges

When seeking the best ways to **provide a productive learning environment** for young people on the spectrum, first **understanding the challenges** that an individual with ASD may face is essential. However, because **each individual** who is on the spectrum **has unique difficulties and needs**, what works for one person may not work for the next.



Tab 1



Tab 2



Tab 3

Value Predictability

Because many individuals on the spectrum thrive on structure in their daily routines and tend to have difficulties with change, ensuring that there is a **sense of predictability** is just one simple way to make the classroom or a specific place a more inclusive environment for all.



Tab 1



Tab 2



Tab 3

Making small (yet impactful) changes

For educators teaching young people with ASD, there are a variety of ways that slightly **altering the teaching style can make a major difference** in elevating the experience. For young people who are on the spectrum, the classroom can be a challenging place to navigate — especially when considering factors such as writing, a noisy atmosphere, or social interaction.



Tab 1

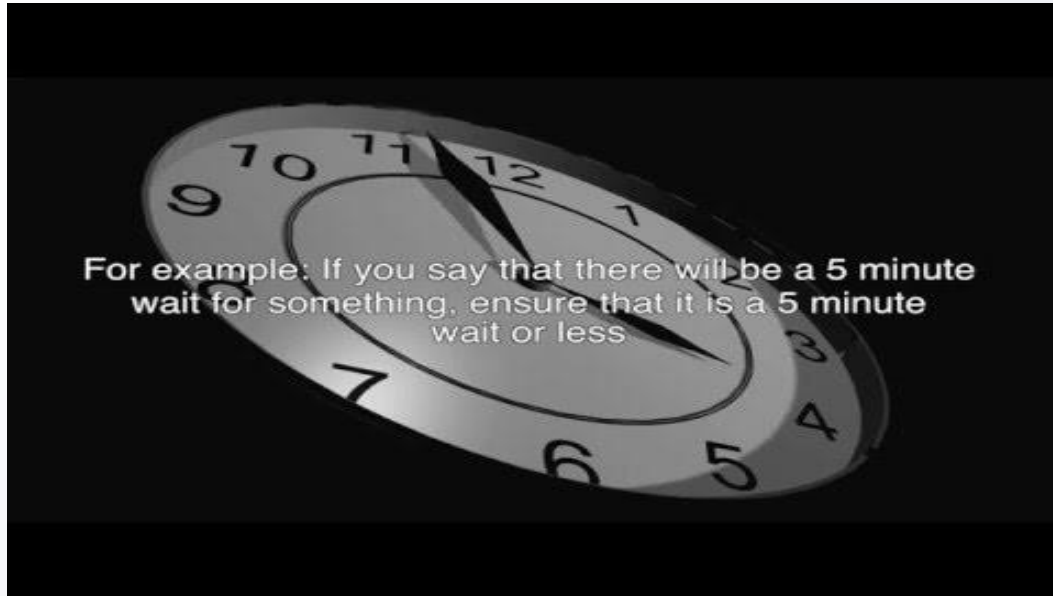


Tab 2



Tab 3

How to build an environment that is autism friendly?



[Check this video out](#)

Inclusive Organisational Structures

A **key characteristic of people with ASD** to consider when thinking about an environment is **sensory sensitivity**.

- ▶ **Hyper-sensitivity:** an exaggerated, negative or avoidance behavioural reaction of sudden onset and/or prolonged duration to sensory stimuli such as noises, lights and smells in the environment;
- ▶ **Hypo-sensitivity:** lack of or reduced response to sensory stimuli such as pain (frequent falls, cuts, etc.), temperature (burns, scalds) and taste (reduced taste abilities).
- ▶ **Compulsive seeking** (sensory seeking/craving) and unusual, absorbing and excessive interest in a specific sensory experience that is abnormal in intensity or duration (specific lights, movements, smells and tactile textures).

Designing for users on the autistic spectrum

Do

- Use **simple** colours 
- Write in **plain** language
- Use **simple** sentences and bullets 
- Make buttons **descriptive**
- Build **simple** and **consistent** layouts 

Don't

- Use bright contrasting colours
- Use figures of speech and idioms 
- Create a wall of text
- Make buttons vague and unpredictable 
- Build complex and cluttered layouts

When we design an environment that can be inclusive for people with ASD, we **need to consider several sensory aspects**. Below is a list of the main ones:

1. Visual sense
2. Auditory sense (Hearing)
3. Touch and pressure sense
4. Olfactory sense (Smell)
5. Taste sense
6. Vestibular sense (Balance)
7. Proprioceptive sense (Space)



Source: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/1-2-3-adhd/202004/making-sense-sensory-overload-in-autism-and-adhd>

Here are some questions that relate to visual sense we should ask ourselves when designing an environment:

- What is the lighting like in the rooms, both natural and artificial?
- What colour are the walls?
- How many things in the room would require visual awareness/recognition?
- Are curtains, carpets and furnishings patterned?



Source: Download Group of people holding question mark icons for free. (2020, July 1).
Vecteezy. <https://www.vecteezy.com/vector-art/1218825-group-of-people-holding-question-mark-icons>

Auditory Sense

An additional sense to pay attention to when thinking about how to create an inclusive environment is **hearing**. People with ASD may be particularly **sensitive** to some specific noises (e.g. ticking clocks, phones, printers) or to the intensity of these noises.

What to do? One suggestion would be to **set possible noises to a low level** and to keep noise-cancelling headphones at hand, in case of noises over which we have no control. In addition, it might be helpful to think of an extra space that can be quieter than where you normally are, so that people can choose according to what they need most at that moment.



Source: Llp, W. (n.d.). Auditory, ear, hear, hearing, listen, noise, sense icon - Download on Iconfinder. https://www.iconfinder.com/icons/5092331/auditory_ear_hear_hearing_listen_noise_sense_icon

Who will use the space?

The **environment** might need to be **different** for children or adults. You might also need to **consider whether the same environment** will be used by others who might have sensory differences, or by a group with very differing sensory needs. If there is a risk of sensory overload; is there somewhere else a person can go to escape from the overload?



Questions

Can there be a **natural flow** from one space to another without using a corridor? Are there **fewer claustrophobic ways** to go up or down a building than the use of lifts?

Transition spaces can be complex for people on the autism spectrum because it can sometimes be difficult to move from one space to another or one activity to another. Therefore, consideration needs to be made as to how to make transition spaces easier to deal with. Some questions you can ask are:

If spaces are being used for large numbers of people, **are there smaller spaces available** for retreat if necessary?



Can you **create a map** of where individuals with autism seem to become most anxious? Are there alternative routes?

If spaces are small and intimate, **are there opportunities** to go easily to a more **open space**?

To enhance inclusion, and reduce potential anxiety, there are a number of processes and practices that can be used. Have you considered:

- **Autism Acceptance:** Use the preferred language for each individual!
- **Focus on strengths instead of challenges!** – It can be easy to focus on the various challenges that an individual with autism faces, but shifting that focus to their strengths, can make a huge impact.
- **Provide opportunities that include everyone!** – Some of you may have power to do this on a large scale, and others on a small scale. There is always room for inclusion. Maybe you are teaching a room of students and can create an inclusive activity. Maybe you are hosting a small gathering and there is an opportunity to include neurodiverse individuals. Taking that chance can make a huge impact!



Examples of Autism-Friendly Sensory Activities

Puzzles:

Activity Goal: Create a calming effect, improve motor skills, and help with visual-spacing issues.

Play Twister

Activity Goal: Practice motor skills, stretch, and strengthen joints and muscles in a fun and exciting way

Finger Painting

Activity Goal: Fulfill sensory needs and create fun art projects for those who don't mind getting dirty.

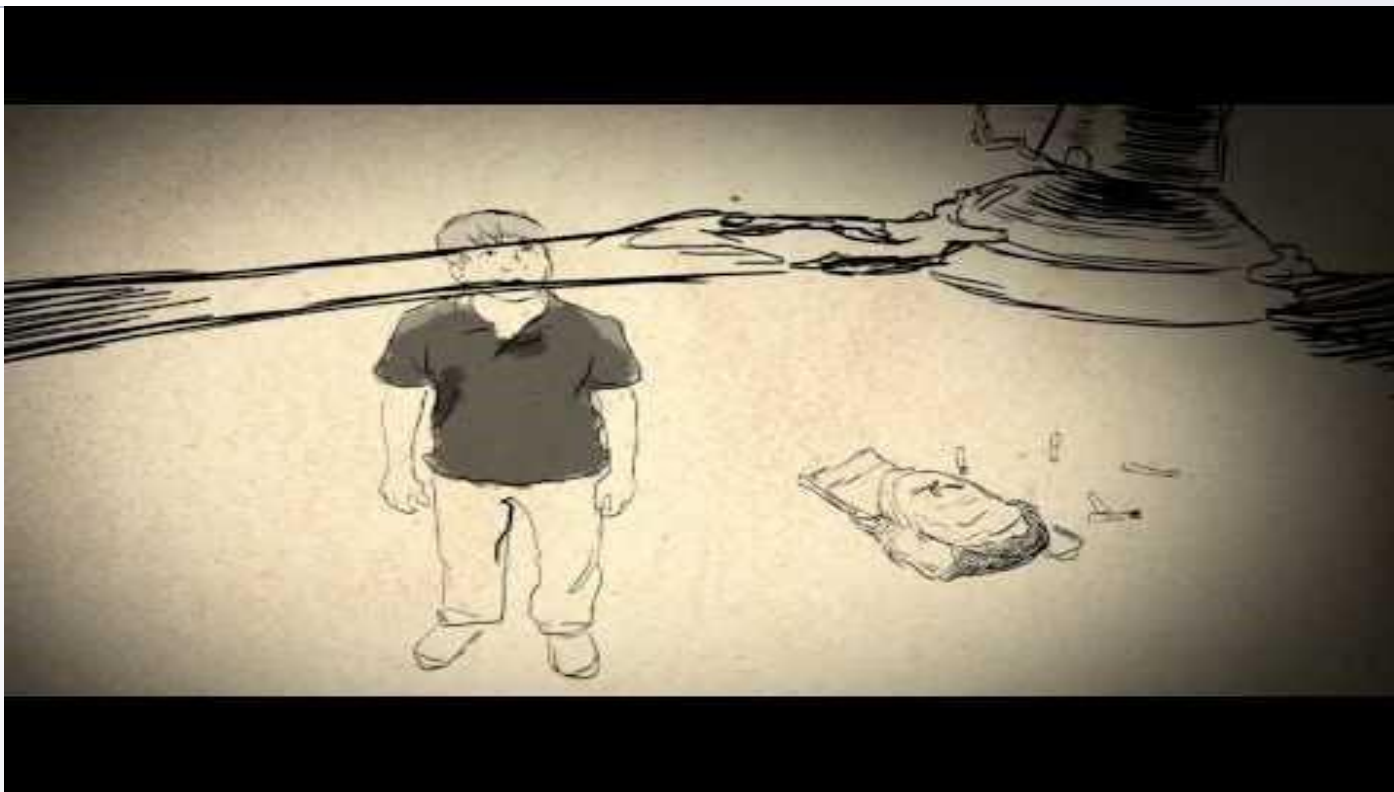
Source: 10 Examples of Autism-Friendly Sensory Activities. (2022, September 7). ACK - Autism Center for Kids. <https://autismcenterforkids.com/autism-friendly-sensory-activities/>

Sensory Sensitivities – Someone with ASD might:

- **display unusual sensory seeking behaviour** such as sniffing objects or staring intently at moving objects.
- **display unusual sensory avoidance behaviours** including evasion of everyday sounds and textures such as hair dryers, clothing tags, vacuum cleaners and sand.
- **display self-stimulatory behaviours** e.g. tapping their temples, flapping their hands, bouncing on their toes.
- **be so intensely engaged** with a favourite sensation or activity that they may not detect danger.

Source: Autism Tasmania. (2022, September 4). Sensory Differences. <https://www.autismtas.org.au/about-autism/key-areas-of-difference/sensory-differences/>

Example: [Check this video out](#)



How do you embrace diversity and inclusion?



Source: Embracing Diversity Inventory. (2022, February 10). Real World Group. <https://realworld-group.com/embracing-diversity-and-inclusion/>

Young people with ASD need more than just education....

“Adapting our own perception, following rather than leading and building bridges are all keys to helping the child with autism learn.”

- Adele Devine-

Assessment



Type the correct answers in the boxes

A strategy that works for one person may not necessarily work in the same way for another....and that is called

"Environmental support" is a general term used to define the systematic use of explicit

A key characteristic of people with ASD to consider when thinking about an environment is

When we design an environment that can be inclusive for people with ASD, we need to consider several

Type the correct answers in the boxes

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Individualised support

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A key characteristic of people with ASD to consider when thinking about an environment is

sensory sensitivity

When we design an environment that can be inclusive for people with ASD, we need to consider several

sensory aspects

QUESTION 1: *When seeking the best ways to provide a productive learning environment for young people on the spectrum, first understanding the challenges that an individual with ASD may face is essential.*

Possible answer(s)

- A. True
- B. False

True / False Questions

QUESTION 1: *When seeking the best ways to provide a productive learning environment for young people on the spectrum, first understanding the challenges that an individual with ASD may face is essential.*

Possible answer(s)	A. True B. False
Correct answer(s)	A. True
Response to correct answer(s)	Congratulations! Your answer is correct.
Response to wrong answer(s)	Not quite right. The correct answer is “A. True”. Because each individual who is on the spectrum has unique difficulties and needs, what works for one person may not work for the next.

QUESTION 2: The environment of spaces might need to be same for children or adults

Possible
answer(s)

- A. True
- B. False

QUESTION 2: The environment of spaces might need to be same for children or adults

Possible answer(s)	A. True B. False
Correct answer(s)	B. False
Response to correct answer(s)	Congratulations! Your answer is correct.
Response to wrong answer(s)	Not quite right. The correct answer is “B. False”. You might need to consider whether the same environment will be used by others who might have sensory differences, or by a group with very differing sensory needs. If there is a risk of sensory overload.

QUESTION 1: To enhance inclusion, and reduce potential anxiety, there are a number of processes and practices that can be used

Possible answer(s)

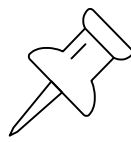
1. Autism acceptance
2. Focus on strengths instead of challenges
3. Provide opportunities that include everyone
4. All of the above

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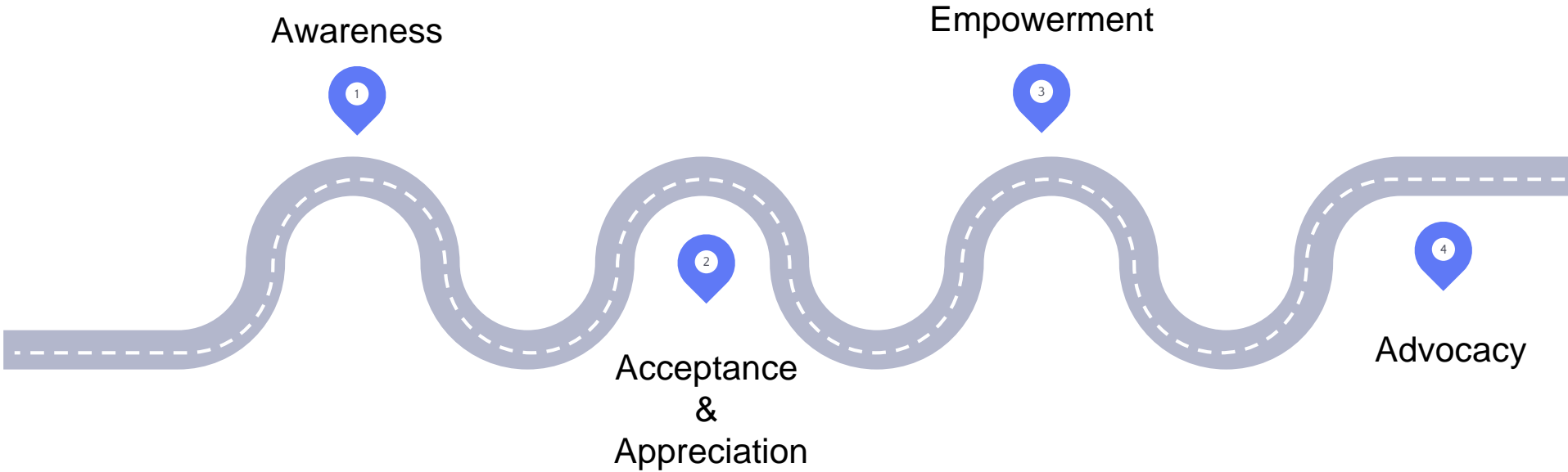
Possible answer(s)	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Autism acceptance2. Focus on strengths instead of challenges3. Provide opportunities that include everyone4. All of the above
Correct answer(s)	Congratulations! Your answer is correct.
Response to correct answer(s)	4. All of the above
Response to wrong answer(s)	Not quite right. The correct answer is “4”.

Let's move beyond the spectrum





Let's move beyond the spectrum...but how?



Bibliography



References

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End of Module

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