

TOP SEVEN MEANINGFUL MODIFICATIONS FOR AN AUTISM-FRIENDLY PERFORMANCE

(for artists/performers/production companies)



Arts for Autism Foundation
of Pittsburgh

PRE-PRODUCTION

1. EDUCATE YOUR PERFORMERS (about autism): Empower the performers and stage crew to interact naturally and to accept that this audience, though engaged, may 'look' and feel quite different; an audience of people with autism may not appear to be paying attention even if they are experiencing something profound
2. CONSIDER SENSORY ENGAGEMENT (sensory aversions and sensory interests):
 - When creating a new show, think about ways to incorporate all of the senses and encourage audience interaction to allow multiple pathways to engagement.
 - For larger, established productions imagine which sound and visual effects might startle or overwhelm an audience member with sensory sensitivities. Seek ways of softening the dynamic or create less jarring auditory and visual effects.
3. INCLUDE RHYTHM AND ROUTINE (people with autism gravitate toward and often feel more comfortable with a predictable rhythm and routine):
 - Incorporate a 'rhythm' that can be anticipated and cycles through the performance
 - If a performance involves audience interaction, it is good to have a rhythm or routine with this as well. Consider building in 'highs' and 'lows' so there is always a way to bring the audience back.
4. EDUCATE YOUR AUDIENCE (what to expect when attending our performance space and show):
 - Provide materials via email, website, downloadable brochure, etc. that include information about the location and layout of the space, history of the performance, description of the performance, opportunities for sensory interaction.
 - If the show is geared toward a younger audience, consider making the guide fun with coloring pages, activities & games, etc.

VENUE

5. EDUCATE THE 'FRONT' OF THE HOUSE (to assure the 'full' theater experience is positive):
 - Appoint knowledgeable, compassionate volunteers in key locations to help guide patrons to where they need to go (box office, theater, concessions, restrooms, break areas) and to field questions.
 - Set-up the box office and lobby to maximize crowd flow
6. START WITH SMALLER NUMBERS (large crowds and packed spaces can spark anxiety):
 - Think about the layout and size of the venue and determine how many patrons with autism will comfortably fit in and easily navigate the lobby, walkways/stairwells and theater space.

PERFORMANCE

7. CONSIDER UNIQUE NEEDS OF THE AUDIENCE (if adults with autism or parents are well-prepared, they can better enjoy the performance):
 - Start the performance on time
 - Before the performance starts and throughout, keep the house lights at half
 - Provide a clear 'exit strategy' (a direction they can easily leave if needed)
 - Offer tactile objects or "fidgets" for theatergoers
 - Establish quiet seating areas outside of the performance space with calming activities (puzzles, crafts, sensory play)
 - Set up a monitor near the quiet seating area so those needing to be outside the theater can still keep up with the performance

LITERATURE FOR LEARNING ABOUT AUTISM

- *Engaging Autism* by Stanley Greenspan, M.D. and Serena Wielder, Ph.D.
- *Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime* by Mark Haddon
- *Playing, Laughing and Learning with Children on the Autism Spectrum* by Julia Moor
- *Unstrange Minds: Remapping the World of Autism* by Roy Richard Grinker
- *Loud Hands: Autistic People, Speaking* by Julie Bascom
- *Social Skills, Emotional Growth and Drama Therapy: Inspiring Connection on the Autism Spectrum* by Lee R. Chasen
- *Thinking in Pictures* by Dr. Temple Grandin
- *Beyond the Wall: Personal Experiences with Autism and Asperger Syndrome* by Stephen Shore
- *1001 Great Ideas for Teaching and Raising Children with Autism* by Notbohm and Zysk
- *The Out-of Sync Child Has Fun* by Carol Stock Kranowitz, M.A.
- *The Social Skills Picture Book: Teaching Play, Emotion and Communication to Children with Autism* by Jed Baker

FEATURE FILMS FOR LEARNING ABOUT AUTISM:

