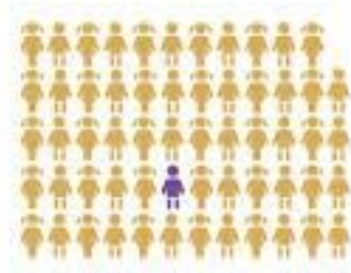


HOW YOU CAN PUT ON A  
SENSORY-FRIENDLY PERFORMANCE!

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## CURRENT STATS

**About 1 in 59 children has been identified with autism spectrum disorder (ASD)**



**1 in 59**  
children living in  
ADDM sites are  
identified with ASD

# WHAT IS AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER?

“Autism,” now referred to as “Autism Spectrum Disorder” [ASD] is defined by

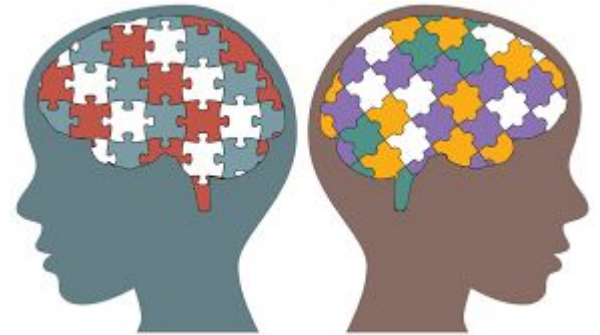
1. Ongoing deficits in social communication
2. Ongoing deficits in social interaction
3. Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities

A. These may include a craving or aversion to sensory input or unusual interest in sensory aspects of the environment (e.g., apparent indifference to pain/temperature, adverse response to specific sounds or textures, excessive smelling or touching of objects, visual fascination with lights or movement)....

4. These symptoms significantly impair a person’s social, occupational, and other important areas of functioning.

# HAVING ASD MEANS...

- People with ASD often find social situations difficult.
- They may struggle to filter out sensory stimuli such as sounds, sights, smells and tastes, which could otherwise cause them to feel overwhelmed or overstimulated particularly in a busy, public place.
- Also, people with an ASD are frequently comforted by visual supports and predictability.



"IF YOU'VE MET ONE  
PERSON WITH AUTISM,  
YOU'VE MET ONE PERSON  
WITH AUTISM."

# WHAT IS A SENSORY-FRIENDLY PERFORMANCE?

- ★ A “relaxed” performance of a show to allow for inclusivity of all audience members
- ★ Adjustments include:
  - certain production elements such as light and sound cues are modified slightly to even out or soften the sensory experience of the show, or removed altogether
  - accommodations made to the venue and pre/post show experience

# COMPONENTS OF A "SENSORY-FRIENDLY" PERFORMANCE

- Assembling a Team
- Marketing, Marketing, Marketing
- Pre-show Guides
- Sensory Toys
- Break Room
- Volunteers
- Performance Day Adjustments and Accommodations
- Post-Show Survey

# FIRST STEPS

- Do Your Research
- Picking the right show
- Picking the right space
  - The most accessible space on campus for a sensory-friendly performance is:

## The Bill Bordy Theatre

- Picking the right people
  - On your team
  - In your cast/On your production team
  - In your Audience
- Representation and Inclusion
- Intentions



# PRE-SHOW: THE MARKETING

- Make a Facebook event describing the performance and specifying who it is for (people with sensory-sensitivities and their family and friends)
- Reach out to local organizations for people with Sensory Sensitivities
- Put an ad in the SPED Newsletter
- Contact other companies who have done this kind of performance to get their audience invite lists
- Local/Parent Facebook groups
- Invite, Invite, Invite

# PRE-SHOW: THE MARKETING

- Local and National Autism organizations (mailing lists)
- Special Ed PTAs and other PTAs of school districts
- Directors of special ed/pupil services/school psychologists and social workers
- Local mental health professionals and physicians that service children with Autism and other disabilities
- Private special education schools.
- Local colleges with education majors/autism certificates

# PRE-SHOW: SURVEY (IF TIME/RESOURCES ALLOW)

- You can send out a pre-show survey to ask parents/teachers/etc:
  - What accommodations/modifications their children usually receive
  - What types of toys/materials are soothing vs. aversive to their kids

# PRE-SHOW: THE SOCIAL NARRATIVE VIDEO/PRINT-OUT

- Video walk-through in the FIRST PERSON of what is to be expected on the day of the performance
- Step-by-step
  - Getting to the theater
  - Entering the theater
  - Meeting Volunteers/Ushers
  - Sitting down
  - Bathrooms
  - Performance
  - Intermission
  - Meet and Greet
  - Leaving the theater
- Provide a PDF file of screenshots of the video for further accessibility and print-out purposes

# SOCIAL NARRATIVE EXAMPLE



# PRE-SHOW: THE CHARACTER GUIDE

- Side-by-Side guide of the Characters and the Actors that play them
- Include pictures of the actors (in costume if possible) as well as a description
- Especially helpful if the show is also a book/TV show/movie

# PRE-SHOW: THE VOLUNTEERS AND TRAINING

- Recruit people to volunteer for the show!
  - Comm disorder students
  - Theatre ed students
- Volunteers will serve as ushers
- They will offer additional assistance when needed
- Hold a training to brief them on expectations
- Helpful to have people on hand who are trained or have experience

# PRE-SHOW: THE EMAIL TO PATRONS

- Send an email to all ticketholders with details
- Attach all pre-show materials
- Give them the option to reply with any questions or further accommodations they may need



# PRE-SHOW: BRIEFING THE ACTORS AND CREW

- Create a presentation for actors and crew informing them on what to expect
  - What is Autism?
  - What adjustments to the show should be expected?
  - Safety: What will happen in case of an emergency in the audience?
  - Judgement-free zone
  - Intentions

# PRE-SHOW: THE SENSORY TOYS, HOW WE DID IT

## Materials:

- Empty Water Bottles
- Flour
- Balloons

You can even draw on the balloons to make them more fun!

# PRE-SHOW: THE SENSORY TOYS, OTHER IDEAS

- Squishy shapes
- Thera putty or silly putty
- Make a tactile sensory soothing kit for each child out of 3 types of material that you cut up into shapes and string together (i.e. fluffy, silky and felt-like)
- Fidget Strings



# DAY OF SHOW: THE BREAK ROOM

- Use The Robbins Center at Emerson College as a contact for break room materials
- Book an (accessible) space in the building to hold this room
- Set up a livestream of the show in the break room

# DAY OF SHOW: THE BREAK ROOM PURPOSE

- IF you want kids to return to show,
  - Make it very quiet, calming and uninteresting so they are not reinforced necessarily and so returning to the show is more interesting and desirable.
- IF you want them to stay in the break room, (as to not distract others, etc)
  - then you want there to be toys and atmosphere that makes it interesting for them so they want to stay there and don't want to go back into the show which could distract others.

# DAY OF SHOW: VENUE ACCOMMODATIONS

- Work with the Director/Production Team, rehearse with actors
- Audience Interaction
  - If the show has audience interaction, adjust it to only be with certain seats and provide a warning
- Allow food, drinks, and electronic devices into the theater
- Provide accessible seating options
- Gender-neutral bathrooms
- Sell fewer seats
- Have trained volunteers and staff on hand

# DAY OF SHOW: PRE-SHOW ACCOMMODATIONS

- “It is well accepted that sensory input provided to a child prior to a seated activity (i.e. sitting in an audience, attending a show) will increase the child’s ability to attend or otherwise participate in a seated activity”

# DAY OF SHOW: PRE-SHOW ACCOMMODATIONS

- Consider having the cast lead the audience in exercises such as:
  - Stand up
  - Clap hands
  - Jump up and down
  - March (even in place if you don't want the kids to move)
  - Reach up in the air with each arm separately and together (i.e to grab the “stars”) which you may create with stage lights...not too bright though!
  - Touch toes, etc.



# DAY OF SHOW: PRE-SHOW ACCOMMODATIONS

- Other ideas:
  - To desensitize to light and sound changes:
    - playing some different music that may get a little louder or faster, then slow down, and have the kids clap hands faster as the music gets faster, and so on.
    - add some colored lights on the floor and have the kids jump in them to try to find a certain color and yell out the color
    - stand in the circles of lights on floor and do simon says for a couple of steps

# APPLAUSE/CHEERING MODIFICATIONS

- Clapping and “woohoo-ing” can cause overstimulation
- Make sure to include clapping in the Social Narrative
- Consider handing out pom-poms to audience members to wave instead of clapping, if budget allows

# LIGHTING MODIFICATIONS

- House lights remain on
- Elimination of strobos
- No light directly at audience

# SOUND MODIFICATIONS

- Keep sound below 90 dB
- Eliminate gunshots, screaming,
- Provide noise-cancelling headphones
- Having a back row of seating that
- is designated as quieter



# SCENIC DESIGN MODIFICATIONS

- Outline the perimeter of the stage (with tape) to provide a visual as to where the stage ends and the audience begins

# ADDING IN A 7TH INNING STRETCH

- Sitting for long periods of time can be difficult!
- In addition to intermission, schedule breaks in the show to allow for stretching/decompressing
- Consider having cast lead the audience in a song with small movements
  - Ex: Take me out to the ballgame

# VISUAL SCHEDULE

- Show each of the steps that the video details of the event, in simple pictures making a trail of steps
- Pics of real people (not cartoons) acting out each step
- It should be very simple to follow one step to the next –prompt the student through the steps, and prepare them visually for what to expect next.

# POST SHOW: THE MEET AND GREET

- Provide the opportunity for audience members to meet the actors!
- Especially for kids, this can be a dream come true experience.
- Be sure to brief actor's on appropriate behavior!





# POST-SHOW: THE MEET AND GREET

- Include details in Social Narrative
- Can the kids hug or shake hands or touch costumes with actors?
- Can the kids take pictures with actors?
- Whatever you decide, you want to make the process as predictable as possible for the kids and their parents
  - include this in the marketing and email to parents.

# POST SHOW: THE SURVEY

- Send out a post-show survey to everyone who attended
- Collect data on their experience
- Use this feedback in future endeavors!

# POST-SHOW SURVEY FEEDBACK

- “Consideration of sensory issues is always going to be helpful.”
- “Although one of my sons is very sensitive to light and sound, he carried through the play while being on the first row! So proud of him!”
- “It was nice to have flexible seating (on the floor in front or in chairs). It was also wonderful that the actors did not mind when our friend with autism threw his fidget toy and ran onto the stage to get it. The actors and crew were entirely professional and fantastic!”

# POST-SHOW SURVEY FEEDBACK

- “Our friends said this was the first time they had attended a "sensory-friendly" performance and they would love to hear about future events. We feel the same. I think it is important to offer sensory friendly performances for children with and without sensory sensitivities to support inclusion and universal design (accessibility is good for everyone!)”

# RESOURCES

- Theatre Development Fund (TDF)
- HowlRound
- A.R.T.

WHAT QUESTIONS DO YOU HAVE?