

CREATING A SENSORY-FRIENDLY PROGRAM AT A LOCAL EVENT, STATE FAIR, OR COUNTY FAIR

This guide to planning, developing, and implementing
a sensory-friendly program at your event

OVERVIEW

What does the term 'sensory-friendly' mean? 'Sensory' refers to any of the senses (i.e. sight, hearing, taste, touch, smell, etc.). 'Sensory-friendly' refers to the idea of creating an experience or environment that is less intense or extreme in relation to the senses. For example, decreasing sounds, motion, or lights to create a calmer environment. Modifications can be made for all of the senses as well. This programming can help provide an environment for individuals with autism spectrum disorder or sensory processing disorder to join in on all the fair fun!

PROGRAMMING

When thinking about implementing a sensory-friendly program, the first step is to analyze your current activities/environment.

Then, think about how the current activities/environment can be modified to make it more sensory-friendly.

Can you modify the amount of sounds/lights/crowds for this activity?

If you can't accommodate a specific activity, you can always provide a designated quiet area or sensory room for families, children, and individuals to take a break from the action.

Are there areas at your event that are naturally less crowded and quieter?

FINDING COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Reach out to local school districts, college programs, and businesses to assist with programming.

Be on the lookout for organizations who possess experience and knowledge about individuals with sensory needs (i.e. local outpatient pediatric therapy facilities, special education teachers, local colleges with related majors).

THINGS TO CONSIDER WITH PARKING

Are there accessible parking spots near the entrance?

Be aware of potential wheelchair/mobility device users.

Is the lot/walkway grassy, gravel, or paved?

Consider Parking Passes for closer parking spots for those attending the event/program.

Provide maps & detailed directions prior to the event on where to park, the costs, and accessible parking spots.

WHAT DAYS TO CONSIDER FOR A SENSORY-FRIENDLY EVENT?

Low attendance days
= less crowds/
commotion/sounds.

Time of day when it is
naturally less busy
(i.e. in the mornings).

PRE-VISIT MATERIALS

'Social Stories' are short descriptions of a particular situation that provide information about what to expect and why. They are a great tool for children to visualize and prepare for a new or unfamiliar activity.

Provide a video of the event space/Fairgrounds, parking (restrooms: family, accessible, adult changing stations).

Create a map/visual of the event space/Fairgrounds for families to preview and plan ahead prior to attending the event.

MAP/VISUAL OF EVENT SPACE/FAIRGROUNDS

Provide a map/visual of the event space/Fairgrounds, parking, events, accessible restrooms, rest areas make attending easier for families, kids, attendees.

Note any areas used for sensory-friendly programming (i.e. stations, games, sensory rooms).

SENSORY ROOMS/CALMING AREAS

- Having a space where kids/adults can take a break from the action is a great way to create an inclusive environment
- Find a quiet, air-conditioned, & accessible space
- Dim the lighting (consider turning down lights and/or utilizing blackout curtains)
- Provide comfy seating (i.e. bean bags, floor mats)
- Have a variety of sensory fidgets toys available: Fidget Spinner, Stress Balls, Pop-it Fidget Toys, etc.
- Play calming music
- Have deep breathing handouts or animal yoga cards
- Share weighted lap socks
- Consider having space for more gross-motor movement activities (i.e obstacle courses)

***Most of these items can be found online. You can also find some of these items at second-hand stores, or through a partner organization.**

VOLUNTEER/EMPLOYEE EDUCATION

It is important to educate volunteers and employees about what sensory-friendly means and how they can best serve the attendees.

Provide tips on how to interact with kids/adults and what they might expect during these events.

Work with ticket admissions, ride operators, food vendors, & fair volunteers to educate them.

TIPS FOR VOLUNTEERS

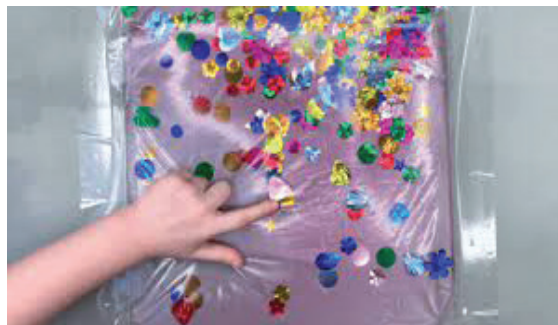
Avoid wearing perfume/cologne. Some individuals may be sensitive to strong scents.

Some individuals may be sensitive to touch. Make sure to ask permission and explain what you are doing.

Kids/Adults may avoid eye contact when communicating. This does not mean they are not listening – continue interacting with them and respect their way of communication.

SENSORY CRAFT IDEAS

Creating a **Sensory Bag** is a simple and fun way to for an individual to explore their tactile and visual senses. It requires minimal materials such as a plastic bag, hair gel, food coloring, and glitter!



Creating a **Sensory Bottle** is another fun craft to create at a sensory- friendly event. A sensory-bottle can be used to help regulate an individual who may be experiencing feelings of stress, anger, sadness, excitedness, or any feelings on an elevated level. It requires simple materials such as a plastic bottle, super glue, water, oil, food coloring, and glitter.

