

Autism design techniques – A cheat sheet

(Adopted from “Autism and the built environment: using design to improve outcomes”, <https://staging3.autismhousingpathways.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Autism-and-the-built-environment---using-design1.pdf>. Not everyone needs all features, but a design that facilitates the provision of these can be adapted to meet individual needs.)

General features:

- Quiet street, established neighborhood, near stores, mass transit; “by-right” property
- Clear lines of sight within common areas (consider cutouts in walls)
- Transitional spaces that allow individuals to preview activity
- Quiet spaces that provide a place to be alone; some may also allow observation of a common area
- Layout that clearly defines the function of a space
- Multiple common areas allow individuals to separate
- No fluorescent lights
- Walking loop
- Common areas and at least one bedroom have abuse resistant drywall or bead board
- Solid core doors
- Recessed lighting
- Built-in shelving and storage
- Floors should be impervious to water
- Non-toxic furnishings and products
- Durable furniture that is easily cleanable, does not have crevices that can harbor mold
- High ceilings to accommodate jumping
- Sensory area
- Space for exercise
- Fence
- Breakaway curtains
- Neutral color schemes
- Smart home/technology
 - Wired for internet (or wireless network)
 - House server
 - Tablets, low tech visuals, or rubrics in each room can provide cueing to increase independence
 - Intercom/apps/phone can allow individuals or staff to ask for help
- May be crucial for some individuals:
 - Unbreakable glass (window film or tempered glass)
 - Alarms

Bathrooms:

- En-suite where possible, plus in common areas
- Floor drains (ideal) or waterproof membrane under floor
- Fully tile walls and ceiling
- Water sensor shut-off device
- Water shutoffs in adjacent room

- Wall-hung toilet with concealed cistern, inspection chamber, and push button flushing
- Faucets must be held down for water to flow
- Adjust water temperature to prevent scalding
- Use only standard size toilet paper rolls to prevent clogging or use a wall mounted dispenser of individual sheets
- Wall-mounted dispensers for soap, shampoo, etc.
- Replace towel rods with weight-bearing grab bars
- Non-skid flooring
- Space for staff to assist

Bedrooms:

- Sound-proof bedrooms for individuals with sleep disorders
- Large bedrooms to retreat into, with personal sensory items and entertainment systems
- Built in shelving and drawers in closets maximizes floor space and prevents dressers from being pulled over
- Dust-mite barriers for mattresses and pillows
- Some individuals need platform beds with very thin mattresses or they may choose to sleep on the floor
- Bedrooms on ground floor for people who jump up and down to minimize damage to ceilings underneath
- En-suite bathrooms where possible

Kitchen:

- Reserve space for individuals to store their personal snacks for the day, including a

second refrigerator; reserve other cabinets and the main refrigerator for meal preparation and storage

- Magnetic induction cooktops to prevent burns
- Countertops with integral backsplashes that are resistant to scratching, burning, cutting or staining
- Make sure there is no space to wedge materials behind the stove.
- Visual supports for meal preparation and cleanup

Sensory area ideas:

- Suspended swing or swing chair
- Beanbag chair
- Body sock
- Weighted blanket
- Therapy ball
- Mini-trampoline
- Basket of “fidgets” (also good to keep one in the living room)

Sensory regulating activities:

- MeMoves
- Sensory music from Arcangelos Chamber Ensemble
 - Music to De-stress
 - Music to Relax
- Short, easily learned yoga routine, such as Salute the Sun
- Sa-Ta-Na-Ma mindfulness meditation
- Short, easily learned indoor exercise routine, such as Leslie Sansone’s 3-minute mini-walk (on YouTube)