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

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• 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
  o Music to De-stress
  o 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)