



IRELAND'S AUTISM CHARITY

Autism Friendly Events Guide



Why do we need to make events autism-friendly?

Socialising and experiencing new things are a big part of the human experience. Obviously, Autistic people like to enjoy themselves and spend time with their friends just like everyone else, however sometimes doing this can be a bit more challenging for Autistic people. Below, we've explained some of the reasons why going to events might be difficult. We then give some ideas for simple changes you can make to ensure that your friends on the spectrum can enjoy themselves too.

Why might it be hard to take part?

Sensory Challenges

Entertainment venues can be extremely busy environments, with lots going on in terms of crowds, noises, smells, lighting and textures. Autistic people often struggle with sensory processing. Some may have particular noises, smells, visuals, textures or tastes which they cannot bear or that they really like e.g. a person may find bright or flashing lights or loud music difficult to cope with.

Social Interaction

Entertainment venues are highly social environments. An Autistic student may be more anxious in the social situation of having to make conversation or knowing how to interact with their group, particularly if they don't know anyone well. They may seem very distant, aloof or blunt but in fact this could be due to their anxiety or could be how they communicate with other people typically e.g. very matter of fact in terms of conversation.

Another challenge that may arise for the Autistic student is that they may be very keen to interact with others but may not know where to begin or what level of interaction best fits the situation. Not knowing how to approach other students and join in can lead to tension and isolation from other students at times.

Anxiety

When things are not very clear or an unexpected situation arises, an Autistic person can become anxious. Like everyone, the more anxious a person is, the more challenging it is for them to enjoy themselves. That is why it is crucial that clear communication and reasonable adaptations are provided to a student to reduce anxiety and allow them to have fun.

Self-Consciousness

Many Autistic people may not have many opportunities to enjoy socialising with friends simply because they are self-conscious about being seen as different. They may be overly aware of their own challenges, and are concerned that people will judge them.

Organising an event that is openly accepting and considerate of Autistic people can help Autistic people to relax and feel they can be themselves.

How do you make your event autism-friendly?

Include an autism-friendly statement

If you've taken steps to make your event autism-friendly, let people know. If Autistic students see that they have been included in the organisation of an event, they are more likely to feel welcomed and to attend.

Introduce a Quiet Area

Given how challenging parts of a hectic event might be for someone who have sensory processing differences, why not create a calmer, chill out zone. This might be a small section cordoned off or a little room to one side away from all the noise and people. There's no need to keep this area exclusively for Autistic people, anyone can enjoy a little down time on a hectic night out. This might seem like a small gesture but is a great support for individuals who do experience distress while they are out. It will allow a person to get away from a particular situation, cool down and collect themselves without having to leave.

Introduce a dedicated sensory-friendly hour or two?

If there isn't space for a Quiet Area, can you create a sensory-friendly hour? If music could be turned down a little and lights could be dimmed a little, the environment will be much more comfortable for someone who is very sensitive to busy stimuli.

Make the event easy to negotiate

Provide clear, simple signage to direct people to where they need to be, and to let them know what's happening. Even better, have a clearly identifiable person available to answer questions.

How do you make your event autism-friendly?

Create an information sheet for the event

Let Autistic people know what to expect from an event. Provide information around the procedure for booking / getting a ticket, arriving at the venue, what to expect and any rules the venue may have. This is handy for all people who want to plan their day/night out.

Provide photos of the venue so people know where they're going. Keep your points short and clear. An info sheet is particularly handy for any student who may struggle with anxiety.

Consider a range of events

Are all of your events centred around loud, busy environments? Do they always happen in the evening? Are there other options for quieter, daytime events? This will help you to include Autistic people, and also people who work evenings.

Do you understand Autism?

You want to include Autistic people at your events, which is fabulous! The best way to be really inclusive is to be sure that you understand the experiences of Autistic people. Have you been to any training offered by your community?

If you have any questions at all about how to make your event more autism-friendly, or about training to better understand the experiences of Autistic people, contact support@AsIAm.ie



IRELAND'S AUTISM CHARITY

