

# Tips for creating autism-friendly retail and hospitality spaces



Creating an autism-friendly environment for your customers doesn't have to be difficult or costly. With a few simple adjustments and genuine understanding of customer needs, you can make your space more accessible and inclusive, enhancing the experience for all customers, fostering loyalty and boosting your brand reputation.

## Our purpose a different brilliant®

Understanding, engaging and celebrating the strengths, interests and aspirations of people on the autism spectrum.

### Provide accessibility information

Autistic people and families often do a lot of planning before going somewhere new, but often have to search around for relevant and accessible information. Providing clear, easy-to-find accessibility information allows Autistic customers to prepare for their visit, reducing stress and creating a more comfortable and welcoming experience. Use your website, app and other communication channels to share:

- information on sensory-friendly initiatives including quiet hours, sensory-friendly sessions and accommodations for hidden disabilities
- sensory maps to highlight sensory-heavy areas (food courts, kitchens or refrigerated sections) and quiet areas (quiet rooms, less crowded sections)
- visual stories or virtual store tours to help customers plan their visit
- details on how customers can contact your business to discuss their needs and request accommodations.

### Create an autism-friendly environment

The built environment typically hasn't been constructed with Autistic people in mind, making it difficult to get to or stay in places that other people take for granted. Make your business more appealing and comfortable to Autistic people by creating predictable, intuitive and sensory-friendly environments. Small adjustments may include:

- reducing sensory input by limiting background music, strong-smelling cleaning products and overly bright lighting
- creating scheduled quiet times or sensory-friendly sessions with reduced lighting, softer music, reduced scents and minimal announcements
- offering designated quiet spaces with seating for sensory regulation and rest

# Shopping and leisure



- displaying clear signage and using consistent layouts to enhance navigation and predictability
- adopting a hidden disability initiative like the [Sunflower Lanyard Scheme](#) that discreetly signals when customers need extra assistance
- managing crowded areas and providing priority checkouts to limit congestion in high-traffic zones
- providing options such as delivery or direct-to-boot services for customers to minimise in-store time
- responding to customer requests for adjustments such as quieter checkouts, assistance with navigating the store or specialised shopping experiences.

## Train staff

Research shows that one of the biggest barriers to Autistic people accessing public places is the attitudes, judgement and behaviours from other people. Educating staff on autism awareness and sensory needs can help create a better experience for Autistic customers. Provide training that:

- educates staff on hidden disabilities and how to support customers, including recognising tools like [Autism Alert Cards](#) or [Sunflower Lanyards](#)
- encourages staff to offer proactive support, such as adapting their communication, guiding customers through crowded areas or making adjustments like lowering music or dimming lights.

## Useful resources

### Australian Retailers Association

[retail.org.au/news-and-insights/predictability-and-flexibility](https://retail.org.au/news-and-insights/predictability-and-flexibility)

### University of Reading

[reading.ac.uk/news/2024/Research-News/Autism-friendly-supermarkets-need-more-than-quiet-hours](https://reading.ac.uk/news/2024/Research-News/Autism-friendly-supermarkets-need-more-than-quiet-hours)

### Inclusive Spaces

[inclusivespaces.io/research/designing-inclusive-retail-environments-catering-to-neurodiverse-shoppers/](https://inclusivespaces.io/research/designing-inclusive-retail-environments-catering-to-neurodiverse-shoppers/)

## We are autism-friendly experts

We believe that understanding a business from an Autistic perspective is critical to creating a truly inclusive environment. That is why the Aspect Autism Friendly team includes Autistic people at all stages of the design, development and implementation of services and programs.

Our team can partner with you to design autism-friendly events or develop tailored supports and resources to enhance your business practices. Our team also provides autism awareness training for staff and can share practical tips to help you get started. Whatever your needs, we are here to help you create a more inclusive and welcoming environment.

To find out more scan below or visit: [aspect.org.au/autism-friendly](https://aspect.org.au/autism-friendly)

