



Autism and ASC-friendly events

Public events are sometimes difficult for autistic people and people with autism spectrum conditions (ASCs), because they can be very sensitive to sensory input, like lights, noise, smells or textures. New places or situations with crowds and strangers can also make people feel anxious about attending events.

Sensory overload and anxiety can lead to people feeling isolated or left out, but a little extra preparation and a few adjustments can make sure the events you run are inclusive for everyone.



Reducing sensory overload

There are many ways to make events less overwhelming to the senses, and even small adjustments can make a big difference to how comfortable people will feel.

- Designate a quiet area where people can take a break from the event – signpost it well so that people can find it easily
- Avoid strong smells and scents wherever possible – remove any plug-ins or air fresheners, and ask staff not to wear strong perfumes
- If you're providing food, try to make sure there is a range of options, and let people know what will be available ahead of time
- Make sure there are some areas with dim lighting – avoid bright flashing lights, and cover fluorescent lights where possible
- Space out noisy activities to reduce areas of overlapping sound
- If you're running a children's or family event, consider providing a play area with toys, sensory equipment and soft cushions



Reducing anxiety

Many of the ways you can make people feel less anxious about attending are simple and easy – some need a little extra resource or investment, but are well worth it for regular and well established events venues.

- Advertise your event's autism-friendly features so that people know about them in advance
- Allow support staff or carers to join for free
- Provide information ahead of the event, explaining what will happen, when and where – including maps, photos or virtual tours of the venue can be very helpful
- Provide a clear running order for the event, and highlight anything that will be particularly bright, noisy, or unexpected
- Make yourself easy to contact for enquiries or requests for special adjustments
- Make it clear that people are welcome to wear hats, sunglasses or

- headphones to limit sensory overload
- Get some input from autistic people or people with ASCs – if you have staff, family or friends who are autistic or have ASCs, their help in planning an event could be invaluable



Further information and advice

There are many online guides and information packs available to help you plan autism and ASC-friendly events, including:

- National Autistic Society guide to holding an autism-friendly event
- ASERT guide to hosting a sensory-friendly event
- Sesame Street provider guide for creating autism-friendly events

There are also local organisations and individuals who are happy to provide advice and guidance, including:

- Autism in Mann - **autisminmann@manx.net** or call **07624 480167**
- Autism Initiatives – **paul.ormond-smith@autisminitiatives.org** or call **01624 814801**
- Crossroads Isle of Man – **info@crossroadsiom.org** or call **01624 673103**
- Manx Mencap – support for people with learning disabilities - **mencap@manx.net** or call **01624 677289**
- Jade Boylan – Jade is an expert-by-experience and autism advocate, who is happy to give advice from an autistic person's perspective. Jade can be contacted by e-mailing **jadeboylan@gmail.com**

Finally, you can check out some of the adjustments being made by organisations in the Isle of Man to promote autism and ASC inclusivity:

- Villa Gaiety provide 360 online maps of each venue, so they can be explored before attending any events or performances. They also provide additional assistance to those who require it, relaxed performances, essential companion scheme and information on how to get to each venue.
- Bus Vannin are one of the leading organisations for using the Sunflower Hidden Disabilities programme in the Island. Part of this service is providing virtual tours of their single and double decker buses
- Ronaldsway airport provide information online about the process of going through security so that people can find out what to expect in advance of travelling. The airport also supports the Sunflower Hidden Disabilities programme.