

Setting Yourself Apart as a Autism Friendly Business

- ❖ So you are looking to rise above the crowd, and proudly proclaim that YOU offer an autism friendly business? Great! Now what? Here are some suggestions that will help you transition to becoming a preferred provider of services that are sought by the autism community.
- ❖ If you are a service provider such as a salon, dentist, or physician's office; once a week offer 2 extra appointment times at the end of the day which are reserved for individuals with special needs. During this period provide a quiet, dimly lit environment with decreased sensory input; and lower patient/customer volumes.
- ❖ Educate your employees and make them aware of the many different things that an individual on the spectrum may notice- that others may not; and how to approach and communicate with an individual with autism to enable a successful visit for every client, every time.
 - Emphasize never approaching an individual from behind, as this can be very startling, and avoid any unexpected physical contact.
 - Speak in a slowly in a loud and clear tone in short phrases. Use the concepts of “now we....then we”
 - Educate employees that individuals with autism may not be verbal, they may communicate with grunting or pointing, may use sign language, may have delayed speech, may use either an electric/computerized alternative communication device.
 - Behaviors such as hand flapping/hitting their head/biting themselves/covering their ears/ spinning or rocking or covering their eyes could all be signs of discomfort and over stimulation.
 - Listen to the parents/caregivers, they are experts in how the person needs to be approached and communicated with. Not all individuals have the same characteristics/traits of autism and sensory sensitivities, so they not respond to strategies in a predictable manner.
 - Be flexible- if a typical method of completing a task will not work with the individual – try other techniques. Unless it is an absolute necessity for safety; do not get hung up on ... “well they have to take off their shoes to be weighed... have to sit like this... etc...”

- If possible and not a threat to safety; show them what tools you will be using and let them handle them. Demonstrate what you are going to be doing with the tool, and of course explain all information in a low, calm voice with shortened phrases.
- Be very patient- individuals with autism are generally much more successful if tasks that will invade their personal space are performed in a very methodical and slow fashion. Again low tone of voice- speaking short phrases in a slow manner.
- If they do have a meltdown remain calm- do not raise your voice or move in a fast or haphazard manner. Ask parents for advice, and note how the parents are able to soothe and comfort the individual, for some it is a hug, others a certain toy or object.
- In order to foster a sense of comfort and familiarity, if possible; designate the same one or 2 people who will be working with the individual. This will also help the staff members become more in tune to the individual's needs.
- Educate employees that individuals with autism may need accommodations in re: standard use of bathroom facilities. Even though my son may be huge and 16, due to his autism I have not allowed him to go into the men's restroom alone. If employees are aware ahead of time that you may see a mother taking her autistic son into a women's restroom; or a father taking his daughter into a men's restroom; it is likely because of the special needs of the individual.

For more information please contact either Mike Dierdorff at MikeDierdorff1965@gmail.com or Margo Dierdorff, OTR/L at Margomouse@hotmail.com.