



PROJECT AWWOL

A World WithOut Labels

Sensory Friendly Arts Experiences

*Meeting the needs of Patrons with
Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
& Sensory Processing Disorders*

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Person First Language



- The words we choose to use, say a lot about how we think and feel.
- Remember to use “has/have”, instead of “is/are”.
- Never assume that someone has or doesn’t have a disability, based on their appearance.



Donna Williams: *The Outsider* from
Drawing Autism by Jill Mulin



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What is Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?

- A complex developmental brain disorder
- Thought of as a spectrum (umbrella) of disorders
- Significantly impacts social skills & communication
- All racial, ethnic, and socio-economic classes are affected





ASD – What we know, so far...

- No known cause
- No medical test for diagnosis
- Diagnosis is based on observed behavior and social history
- No known “cure,” but evidence-based approaches can improve outcome



Facts & Stats

- Occurs in approximately 1 in 68 children; it is around 4 times as common in boys as it is in girls
- Approximately 20-25% develop seizures
- Often occurs along with other disabilities
- Recent research identified possible genetic links to ASD



Other Challenges That May be Present

- **Hyper/hypo sensitivity to the environment**
- **Decreased fine and/or gross motor skills**
- **Difficulty with attention & organization**
- **Decreased social motivation**
- **Anxiety or depression**
- **Problems eating or sleeping**
- **Challenging behavior**



Practical accommodations

- Provide a brief overview of the show/exhibit before starting the experience
- Keep attention span in-mind (5min + 1 min p/year of the child's age)
- Ensure that staff are aware of alternative activities
- Avoid words like “stop” or “no”; Tell the child what you WANT them to do





Practical Accommodations

- Consider that children have different ways of responding to the environment, and expressing their needs/wants.
- Always encourage the patron and/or their family have a role in finding solutions
- Remember Three C's:
 - Calm
 - Consistent
 - Compassionate



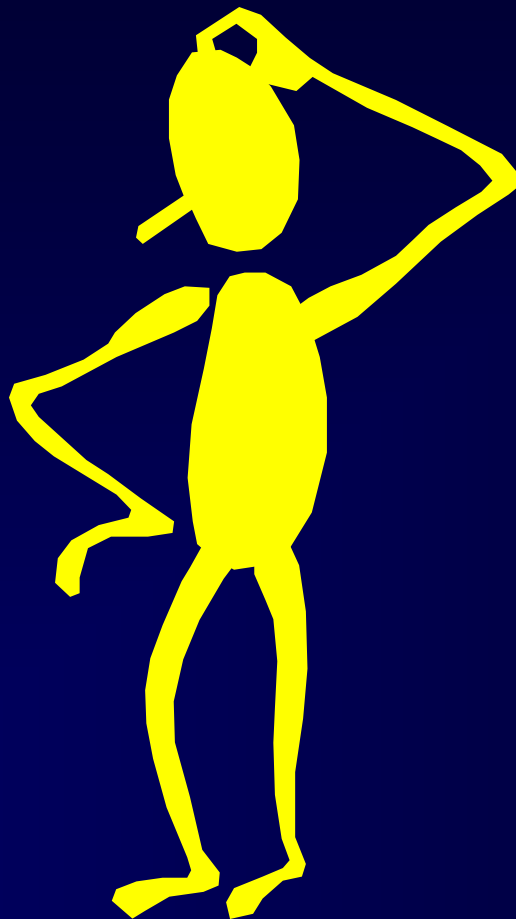
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THE ARTS ARE FOR EVERYONE!

**Eleni Michael, Dancing
with the Dog, 1995
from *Drawing
Autism* by Jill Mulin**

What is Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD)?



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Sensory Processing Disorder

SPD is “a neurological disorder that disrupts the way an individual processes and responds to sensations.”

- SPD Foundation, June 2014



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Sensory Processing Disorder

- Sensory signals don't get organized into appropriate responses.
- SPD prevents certain parts of the brain from receiving the information needed to interpret sensory information correctly. Likened to a neurological “traffic jam.”
- The cause of SPD has not been identified.
- Research - Possible physiological differences in the brain





Sensory Processing Disorder

- SPD symptoms occur on a spectrum much like that of ASD
- SPD may affect only one sense or several senses including oversensitivity to lights, odors, noises, touch, balance, and taste
- Individual may be over-or under-responsive to one or more sensations, or may have problems with motor skills and coordination





Sensory Processing Disorder

- Studies by the SPD Foundation suggest that more than three-quarters of children with autistic spectrum disorders have significant symptoms of Sensory Processing Disorder.
- SPD appears more prevalent in individuals identified as gifted or with ASD or ADD/ADHD but appears to be a separate disorder
- Affects more than 4 million children in the US – an estimated 5-16%
- Approximately 1 in 20 individuals are affected





Imagine if:

- The humming of the lights sounded louder than my voice
 - Your clothes felt like they were made of fiberglass
 - The different smells in the room made you utterly nauseous
- Stanley Greenspan, *The Challenging Child* (1995)





**“People will forget what you said,
people will forget what you did,
but people will never forget how
you made them feel.”**

- Maya Angelou



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D.J Svoboda, *Big Field Friends*



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