



PAPER MILL PLAYHOUSE AUTISM-FRIENDLY PERFORMANCES

~ creating a sensory friendly theater environment for young audiences with autism and other developmental disabilities ~

DESCRIPTION:

Autism-Friendly Performances (aka **Sensory-Friendly and Relaxed Performances**) are designed and intended for families with children having autism or other developmental disabilities. At these performances the theater environment will be altered, providing a comfortable and judgment-free space that is welcoming for these families. This program is designed and planned in cooperation with the award winning **Paper Mill Autism Advisory Team**: *Linda S. Meyer Ed.D., MPA, BCBA-D, CPT*; *Kelly A. Carlile M.A. BCBA*; *Jeffrey Jacobs M.A. BCBA*.

ACCOMMODATIONS INCLUDE:

- **Keep house lights up, but dimmed** inside the theater (30%)
- **Maintain consistent sound level & sometimes lower volume:** allow performers to speak at accustomed levels; control sound at the sound console
- **BYO reinforcements and motivational systems:** a reward to help encourage attentive listening and watching, sometimes providing snack foods or earned time to play on an iPad.
- **Allow BYO snacks & drinks in the house:** however, concessions areas are open for business as well many children on the spectrum and watching, sometimes providing snack foods or earned time to play on an iPad.
- **Kids free to talk and leave their seat:** under parental supervision
- **If longer than one hour the show should include an intermission:** typical one-hour TYA performances **do not** require an intermission, rather a free-range approach. Performances longer than one-hour should insert an intermission.
- **Provide an Activity Area with a “Chill Out” zone:** a dedicated area stocked with tactile toys and activities to engage children while waiting in the lobby before the show and during intermission, or during a show should the child need a break from the live performance. Also provide private spaces to take a child who may be over-stimulated and needing quiet. For some, this may be an alternative to leaving altogether.
- **Provide a “Family” bathroom :** The Women’s bathroom off the main lobby are gender-neutral, all others are gender specific
- **Online resource materials:** www.papermill.or/autism-programs
 - social story (aka sequence book), and sequenced video clips of tasks
 - Activity booklets with Theatre Vocabulary; show related puzzles and coloring pages, study guide from theater company
 - sing-a-long prep video on www.PaperMill.org
- **“Meet Your Seat!” FREE Open House** on the day before the show, but during box office business hours, expressly for children to visit the theatre space before the show. (no reservation required). For children who have difficulty transitioning into a new space, this give the families a “dry run” as some will not purchase a ticket if they are unsure if their child will enter the theater.
- **Option to cap the seating at about 80%** of capacity (at Paper Mill, that is 800-900 of our 1200 seats) allowing for wiggle room and minimizing fear of crowd – also reduce stimulus. Add additional performances on same day if demand warrants.
- **Tickets should have a variety of price points:** Paper Mill charges \$8.50-\$12 for TYA shows and \$35-\$95 for main stage.
- **Exit survey:** Take an exit survey and send an online survey to all patrons to rate accommodations

ADAPTED SCRIPTS:

- Be literal in narrative
- Eliminate use of sarcasm, innuendo and body-language (pantomime)
- Replace pantomime with props as necessary
- Eliminate or tone down moments of great intensity, abstraction, volume or fear. Main Stage titles should already be child-friendly and adapted as budget allows.

OTHER RESOURCES:

- **Theatre Development Fund:** Autism Theatre Initiative: download the “ATI Planning Guide” www.tdf.org
- **The Kennedy Center:** publication: “Sensory Friendly Programming for People With Social and Cognitive Challenges: A Guide for Performing Arts Settings” kennedy-center.org/accessibility/services/sensory

Questions? Contact Paper Mill Playhouse Director of Education Lisa Cooney: 973-315-1667 or LCooney@papermill.org
FOR PAPER MILL RESOURCES AND VIDEOS, GO TO: www.PaperMill.org/education/autism-friendly