



Ryan Godfrey

Sensory Sensitive Schematics

Isolation can occur when someone, or a group of people are treated like others. Thankfully, with social media, time to listen, and avenues for minorities and/or the systematically ignored to share their stories, architecture and architects can begin to create a more inclusive environment. Not inclusive solely in the sense of personal interaction, but in the way rooms, buildings, and systems are designed. Individuals with autism have revolutionized entire fields: take Temple Grandin who not only changed how the medical field perceives and helps with the challenges autism can present, but also the cattle industry with a conveyor system for slaughtering cattle in a way that is more humane, natural, and easier to control. But, what if an office or bathroom is designed in a way that is impossible or extremely difficult to be in for a person with autism? Thankfully, there is a plethora of simple solutions to help spaces be more inclusive towards these individuals, and any individual who has similar needs, that does not require extensive research or detailing on the architects side, or large sums of money on the owners side. Inclusivity does not need to be expensive or difficult, sometimes it just takes some empathy and listening.

Being inclusive and mindful of people who are sensitive to sensory inputs does not have to be more expensive or specialized, or even decrease the number of work stations in an office. In fact, it offers more flexibility in work environments and is appealing to neurotypical individuals too. Calm spaces, adjustable desks, a variety of seat options, and adjustable lights are things many offices already use at little to no additional cost. A yoga ball as a chair is cheaper than a regular chair, an adjustable desk that can move is cheaper than a cubicle, and sound masking wall tiles are cheaper than traditional decor and can be a great place for branding. Adjustable lights allow for any individual to feel a level of control over their environment for a minimal price. Inclusivity is achievable in the most rigid office environments.

Restrooms are the epicenter of conversations about inclusivity in many cases. Autism is no exception. Restrooms for anybody can be overwhelming and/or boring. Having acoustic tiles and sound masking blankets or decor can be a cheap way of decreasing the reverb without spending a lot of money. But, be careful of not making the restroom too overwhelming. Covering pipes can be useful in any environment to decrease inconsistent, distracting sounds that would annoy anybody. Designing, remodelling, or revamping for decreasing sensory triggers can be appealing to everyone. Inclusivity does not mean isolating or discriminating against a different group, it means allowing spaces to be inhabited by all regardless of who they are.

