

Sheltering: Sensory Items

Individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) may show sensory sensitivities demonstrating either over-or under-reactivity to particular lights, smells, sounds, tastes, and/or touch/motion. This can be exacerbated for some children and adults during times of a disaster, to include when they are sheltering. Shelters with sensory items/kits/rooms/tents, may assist in reducing anxiety experienced from these challenges.

The purpose of this fact sheet is to provide information and resources for providing sensory items to help reduce stress or overstimulation for both children and adults during times of a disaster.

What is Sensory Kit:

A sensory kit is a self-created resource, of single or multiple meaningful items provided to an individual or placed in a designated common space. These kits have proven to be helpful, during times of high stress or crisis, allowing the individual to soothe and/or self-organize while in a shelter. The kit may contain items like noise-canceling headphones, weighted blankets or lap pads, multiple types of fidget toys and other comfort items.

Sensory Kits are not just used by an individual, they are used in everyday settings by groups and organizations such as schools, Day-Care Centers for children and adults, hospitals, and fire departments.

What is a Sensory Room/Sensory Tent:

A sensory room/tent is a designated area specially designed to be away from high traffic areas to help individuals develop, de-escalate, and engage their senses. The space can accommodate those with sensitivities to noise, crowds, and other stress related behaviors.

Aids within the room/tent can include dim lighting, colors, sensory soft play objects, chewable mouth-safe items, and sounds, such as a white noise machine, which can be contained within a safe environment that allows the person using it to explore and interact without personal/physical or emotional risk.

Why Address Sensory Related Issues in a Shelter?

- To empower individuals and families
- Promote the mental and emotional shift to a calmer mindset
- Help one's body/muscles to be less tense
- Lower/slow heart rate
- Help relieve stress/anxiety and re-direct focus

Benefits to Those Who Might Use Sensory Kits or Sensory Rooms

Sensory item, a kit or room can be used by individuals to reduce stress or overstimulation to by people displaying neurologically atypical patterns of thought or behavior; ASD, Sensory Processing Disorder, severe attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), behavioral issues, and anxiety. These kits can also help individuals with sensitivities to noise, crowds, and other stress related behaviors in an environment which is soothing and calming to the individual.

Look for Sensory Items with Specific Uses:

- Promoting emotional awareness
- Fostering creativity
- Encouraging self-expression
- Supporting self-worth through creative play
- Assistance in calming anxiety











Building Sensory Kits:

Kits should be stocked and supplied to serve individuals in congregate and/or non-congregate shelter populations.

Local and national organizations can be contacted to assist in developing kits to support shelters. Some organizations such as nonprofits, local colleges, Social Services, and libraries, may have kits that can be loaned or donated to local entities.

Choose Products Which Address all the Senses:

- Sight (what a person can see)
- Sound (what a person can hear)
- Things which a person can smell
- Things which a person can touch/feel
- Items which support Speech/language
- Items which encourage or calm movement

Sample Items below are suggestions <i>only</i> and are not meant to identify or suggest purchase from any vendor.	Image
Bean Bags	
Coloring Books with Markers	
Communications Board	
Crawling Tunnels	
Fidget Toys	
Pop Up Tent	
Sand Timers	
Sanitary Headphone Covers	
Sensory Brush	
Sensory Pads	

Sound Blocking Headphones	
Spiky Tactile Glove	
Squish Balls	
Weighted Ankle Bands	
Weighted Blanket	
Weighted Lap Pad (5lbs)	
Weighted Shoulder Wrap	
Weighted Vest	
Weighted Wrist Band	
Yoga Balls	

Contact any local group, libraries, schools, and colleges that could possibly have kits and/or information to support both children and adults to help reduce stress or overstimulation. Below you will find a list of some possible national groups. List is **not** all inclusive.

National Community Advocacy

	<p>The Arc of the United States (The Arc®)</p> <p>Promotes and protects the human rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities through policy and advocacy, initiatives on various aspects of life, and resources.</p>	Washington	D.C.	(800) 433-5255
	<p>Association for Autism and Neurodiversity (AANE)</p> <p>Works with individuals, families, and professionals to help people with autism spectrum build meaningful, connected lives. They provide resources on a wide variety of topics as well as community, support, and advocacy.</p>	Watertown	MA	(617) 393-3824
	<p>Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD)</p> <p>Supports and promotes a national network of federally funded university-based interdisciplinary programs. These centers include the University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research, and Service (UCEDD), Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities (LEND) Programs, and Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Research Centers (IDDRCs)</p>	Silver Spring	MD	(301) 588-8252
	<p>Autism Society</p> <p>Provides advocacy, education, referrals, support, and more at the national, state, and local level through their nationwide network of affiliates.</p>	Rockville	MD	(800) 328-8476
	<p>Autism Speaks®</p> <p>Addresses the needs of people on the autism spectrum and their families through advocacy, support, resources, and research.</p>	Our Locations	Various	Check website
	<p>Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN)</p> <p>Seeks to advance the rights of people with autism. They are run by and for autistic people.</p>	Washington	D.C.	(202) 596-1056

 <p>Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network (AWN) Neurodiversity Is For Everyone™</p>	<p>Autistic Women and Nonbinary Network (AWN)</p> <p>Provides community, support, and resources for autistic women, girls, nonbinary people, and all others of marginalized genders. Neurodiversity Is For Everyone™.</p>	Lincoln	NE	Check website
 <p>American Academy of Pediatrics DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™</p>	<p>The Council on Children with Disabilities (COCWD) Autism Subcommittee</p> <p>Provides evidence-based guidance on caring for children and teens on the autism spectrum. Dedicated to the Health of all children®.</p>	Itasca	IL	(800) 433-9016
 <p>The Color of Autism Foundation</p>	<p>The Color of Autism Foundation Connecting Families to Culturally Competent Support</p> <p>The organization works to provide culturally competent resources for early and accurate diagnosis and empower families to advocate for services.</p>	Detroit	MI	(313) 444-9035
 <p>GRUPO SALTO</p>	<p>Grupo Salto - Support for Families with Children with Disabilities, Focusing on Autism</p> <p>Serves as a support group for Latino families who have children with disabilities, especially autism. They work to provide culturally competent information and services to families.</p>	Berwyn	IL	(773) 724-0349
 <p>ITAC INTERDISCIPLINARY TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER ON AUTISM AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES</p>	<p>Interdisciplinary Technical Assistance Center (ITAC) on Autism and Developmental Disabilities</p> <p>As part of the Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD), ITAC provides a wide range of training and technical assistance (TA) services that support the important work of interdisciplinary training programs.</p>	Silver Spring	MD	(301) 588-8252
 <p>NACDD National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities</p>	<p>National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities (NACDD)</p> <p>Serves as the national association for the 56 Councils on Developmental Disabilities (DD Councils) across the United States and its territories. The DD Councils receive federal funding to support programs that promote self-determination, integration, and inclusion for all people in the United States with developmental disabilities.</p>	Washington	D.C.	(202) 506-5813
 <p>NATIONAL AUTISM ASSOCIATION</p>	<p>National Autism Association (NAA)</p> <p>Promotes safety and addresses urgent needs of the autism community through advocacy, education, awareness, research, and tools.</p>	Portsmouth	RI	(877) 622-2884

Resources:

- [Autism Statistics and Facts | Autism Speaks](#)
- [Autism by the Numbers - National Autism Data Center](#)
- [Data & Statistics on Autism Spectrum Disorder | CDC](#)
- [ADDM-Community-Report-SY2020-h.pdf \(cdc.gov\)](#)
- [Autism Spectrum Disorder \(aap.org\)](#)
- [Quick Facts About Autism - Autism Science Foundation](#)