

ROYAL ARMOURIES

MUSEUMS FOR ALL

VISITORS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS:
AUTISM



Autism is a spectrum of neurodevelopmental conditions, characterised by difficulties in the development of social relationships and communication skills, in the presence of unusually strong narrow interests, repetitive behaviour, and difficulties in coping with unexpected change.

Simon Baron-Cohen Autism Research Centre website

<http://www.autism.org.uk/about-autism/autism-and-asperger-syndrome-an-introduction/what-is-autism.aspx>



2:19

STRONG VOICES PROJECT AT FORT NELSON

A group of teenagers with autism will be putting on a fab exhibition of Light Graffiti at Fort Nelson with an aim to achieve their Bronze or Silver Arts Award.



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The Butterfly Fx
Non-Profit Organization

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Difficulties we encountered:

SENSORY

Gun fire loud noises and rotten egg smell, dark tunnels and rooms, temperature changes and smells associated with that, echo in the Visitors Centre when it is crowded.

BEHAVIOUR

Teenager becomes anxious and upset, some become angry, some began to exhibit calming behaviours like rocking, flapping, making repetitive noises and/or withdrawing into a corner, under a table etc. Some withdrew from all communication by playing on a hand held game console. Over obsession with smell and sounds and will not move on. Objecting to smell sounds and refusal to remain in area and with group.

MAKING SENSE OF SURROUNDINGS

New toilets, gallery space with lots of interesting objects to touch and climb, ramparts and other dangerous features which can be climbed, vast site which can become easily lost in (e.g. Lots of rooms that look the same from the outside).

BEHAVIOUR

Failure to keep up with tour guide, running away from the group, climbing on exhibits or in areas that are cordoned off.

ORGANISATION/CONCENTRATION

Teenagers could become easily distracted, e.g. Touching and climbing where shouldn't. Loosing bags, coats etc because they are concentrating on so much else. Unable to follow a standard tour, difficulty concentrating on one task at a time so failing to complete anything.

BEHAVIOUR

Wanting to look at everything and becoming upset that cant, refusal to look at anything, loosing bags and coats and becoming upset as a result, loosing calming objects like camera or gameboy and becoming upset.

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Simple solutions:**EXPLAIN EXPLAIN EXPLAIN****ENCOURAGE THE BEHAVIOURS THAT HELP AND DISCOURAGE THOSE THAT DONT****SENSORY**

Explain what will happen, e.g. Countdown for gunfire

Explain the smells encourage them to take an interest in the reasons behind the smells

Offer them tools to help deal with fears e.g. Ear defenders for gunfire, torches for dark areas

Allow calming behaviours **but don't engage with them when they are doing this**, e.g. Game consoles, noise making, sitting under the table, standing in a corner.**MAKING SENSE OF SURROUNDINGS**

Explain surroundings to prepare them, could use a map, could show photos of key areas e.g. Toilets, cafe etc. These can be sent out to groups before they arrive at the museum.

Recommend a good ratio of adults to kids particularly if they are coming as a group without parents.

On arrival, explain what they should not do in your museum and get them to identify the reasons why, if they understand the rules they are more likely to follow them.

ORGANISATION/CONCENTRATION

Focus attention on one thing, so on a tour show each individual something to look at and give them a task, something to find out.

Dont give them more than one object to choose from (or they may refuse to look at anything, making a choice is hard)

Dont expect all to stand and listen to a talk on a general area or theme for long. Give them one job to do which helps them understand what they are looking at, e.g. A photo journal of their tour.

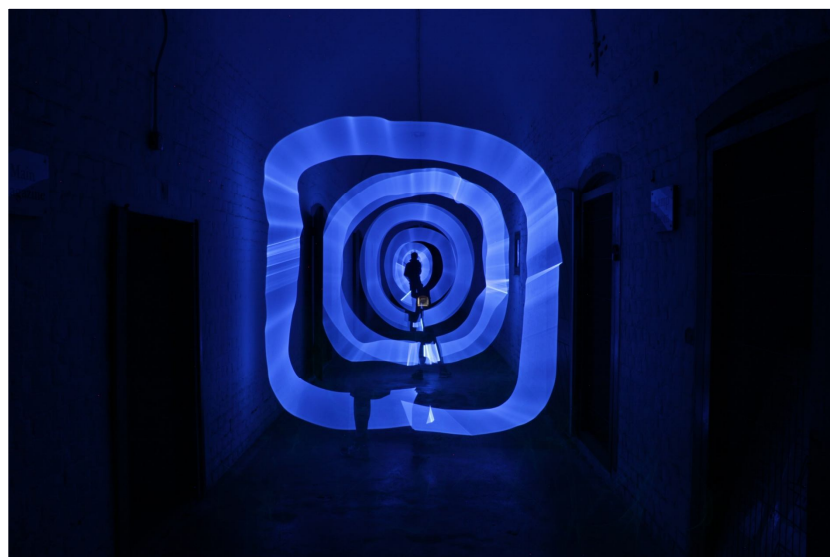
Dont expect them to find sharing easy, direct turn taking and it must be logical and fair (If you dont need to share avoid it).

Remind them to collect belongings at obvious points.

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•How might you deal with Autistic children who have become over anxious and need to be isolated from the rest of the group?

Make sure good adult :child ratio so a trusted adult can remove them

Identify a space which is quiet and suitable and inform group of that space at beginning (careful how you explain that space to the individuals)

Be flexible and try to avoid getting to that position in the first place, work closely with adults that know them to help you.

•Time frames, what works best. For example how do you know how long a tour should be for an autistic group?

Again work closely with adults who are bringing them. Be flexible, be willing to stop a tour for a break with an intention of going back to it. Use techniques mentioned to extend their concentration.

•How do you deal with behaviours that might upset other members of the public?

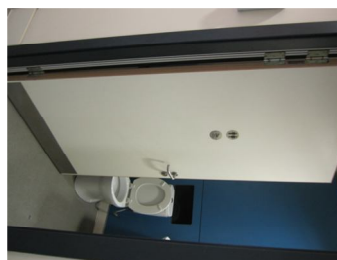
Dont worry too much by other members of the public. As adults arriving with the children when would be the best time to do activities in public areas e.g. Is the child will upset others advise that do activities when museum is quieter this will also benefit the child.

Involve the public in activity if it looks like it might be a problem e.g. Light graffiti in tunnels teenagers taught public about what they were doing, distraction techniques to prevent confrontation.

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USEFUL WEBSITES

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- <http://www.autism.org.uk/>
- <http://www.portsmouth-autism-support.co.uk/>
- <http://www.autismspeaks.org/>
- <http://www.talkaboutautism.org.uk>

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Seastemic Project science education in schools– Lead by Portsmouth College

Call for help with research – Do you get any schools visiting your museum **from the Portsmouth area** that come to specifically study **science** in 2013 and 2014? We just need figures, number of schools/number of pupils/year

Please can you write your email below and Eileen Clegg from the Royal Armouries will be in touch. Thank you for your help.

Name	Organisation	email

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