

Building Sensory-Friendly Public Spaces

Here are some things for you and your workplace or educational setting to consider that might reduce sensory overload or executive function overwhelm:

Visual

- Make lights dimmable
- Used diffused light sources in some areas
- Restrict use of flash photography or torches
- Use clear, contrasting colours for presentation slides (refer to colourblindness chart)
- Make signage and handouts easy to read and simple
- Limit 'visual noise' such as graphics and posters

Sounds

- Have a policy regarding phone notifications
- Use pods or smaller office areas for phone calls
- Encourage the use of microphones and headphones
- Equip spaces with materials that absorb and dampen echo, when possible
- Have designated silent areas and designated noisy areas for meetings and phone calls

Textures, Personal Space

- Appreciate that some people prefer elbow bumping or a wave, to handshakes or hugs
- Allow for a variety of dress codes
- Normalize the use of stress balls, fidget spinners, doodling, kneeling stools that rock

- Space out chairs, provide semiprivate seating near corners or barriers where people might feel safer

Smells and Tastes

- Avoid the use of air fresheners or reed diffusers
- Use sensory-friendly, green cleaning supplies
- For catered events, tell attendees the exact menu in advance
- Provide 'bland' foods as well as spicy or exotic foods
- Indicate ingredients and gluten-free/vegan/Halal status

Executive Function

- Normalize the use of countdown tools for time-blindness, body-doubling/ buddies to help keep people on task
- Use of visual countdown timers for time blindness
- Flexible working hours and places, for example office and working from home
- Use of assistive technology such as screen readers, Dragon, Otter.ai, closed captions on Google Meet