

DREAM NETWORKS

SMALL CHANGES, BIG IMPACT

DESIGNING NEUROINCLUSIVE SPACES



IT IS NOT ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL

Neurodivergent people including autistic people and people with ADHD, dyslexia and dyspraxia experience and respond to environments in different ways. There is no single “neuroinclusive” environment, it’s not enough for us to apply a fixed set of design solutions or principles.

Instead we need to listen, observe, and understand how people's sensory preferences influence how a particular place is experienced.

People may process sensory information, movement, attention, communication, transitions and social interaction differently. Experiences also vary from person to person and are influenced by context.

Small changes to sound, light, layout, movement, activity or expectations can make a significant difference often without redesigning or refurbishing the whole environment.

1 LISTEN FIRST

Start by understanding people’s experiences.



Talk with children, young people, adults, caregivers and professionals where appropriate. Observe how people use the space: where they feel comfortable, what they avoid, when they engage and when they need to pause.

People may be hypersensitive (hyperresponsive) to some sensory experiences, finding particular sounds, lights, textures or smells unusually intense. Others may be hyposensitive (hyporesponsive), noticing some sensory information less readily or seeking stronger sensory input. These responses can vary between people and across situations.

Listening can also happen through play, movement, making and observation, particularly when experiences are difficult to express through words.

LISTEN → OBSERVE → UNDERSTAND → RESPOND.

CASE STUDY

Before designing anything, both teams team listened. They ran hands-on play sessions with autistic children, and therapists, using movement and sensory activity instead of just words, so every child could take part.

What ASD publics learned shaped a practical guide now used to design playgrounds across the city. What Dream Networks learned empowered autistic children to design a social and regenerative play spaces for their school.

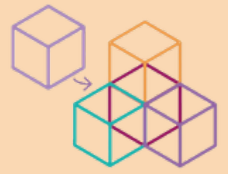


ASD PUBLICS, BARCELONA



**DREAM NETWORKS
PLAYFUL ENGINEERS LONDON**

2 MAKE SPACES ADAPTABLE



Instead of designing one “ideal” environment, think about how the existing environment can offer different possibilities.

Adaptability does not necessarily mean redesigning or refurbishing the whole space.

- Identify and consider the visual, auditory, tactile and olfactory qualities of the environment
- Create opportunities to experience space through multiple senses, such as light, sound, texture, movement, smell, colour and material.
- Make spaces adaptable and responsive, allowing people to seek, avoid or modify sensory experiences according to what works for them.

A space might provide quieter or more active areas, places to move or sit, opportunities to be close to others or slightly apart, and ways to adjust light, sound, visual information or activity levels.

ASK YOURSELF: CAN THE SPACE ACCOMMODATE DIFFERENT WAYS OF SENSING AND EXPERIENCING IT?

CASE STUDY

A school designed to adapt, not the other way round. Classrooms shift to suit how a child needs to work, quiet corners for focus, open space for groups, doors that open onto gardens for a change of scene. Sound-absorbing materials keep noise contained, so every space can flex to different sensory needs.



**WESTMARK LOWER SCHOOL
CALIFORNIA**

3 REDUCE DEMANDS

Reduce unnecessary demands and give people choice in how they participate.

Consider the sensory, social, cognitive and physical demands of a space. Provide predictability, steady rhythms and different ways to engage.

People should be able to observe, pause, withdraw or join in without being expected to participate in one particular way.

This might mean providing a quieter place to pause, making transitions predictable, allowing movement, or reducing visual and auditory clutter.

ASK YOURSELF: CAN PEOPLE CHOOSE HOW, WHEN AND WHETHER I ENGAGE?

CASE STUDY

Safer London adapts its support around the individual. Young people can choose how and where sessions take place, including face-to-face or online, with sessions adapted in length and format.

Rather than expecting people to adapt to a fixed environment, reduce unnecessary demands and give people choice in how they engage.



SAFER LONDON

GET IN TOUCH

**WANT TO EXPLORE HOW SMALL CHANGES COULD MAKE SPACES AND PLACES MORE INCLUSIVE?
CONTACT US HELLO@DREAMNETWORKS.CO.UK**