



Supporting Individuals with Disabilities: Inclusive Practices for Local Businesses

For many people with disabilities and their families, daily life presents unique challenges. Disabilities affect not just the individual but their entire support system, often bringing emotional, financial, and physical stress. By implementing supportive practices in your business, you can play a vital role in enhancing their quality of life.

Families of individuals with disabilities have shared some of their experiences:

- “My son has massive anxiety in addition to his autism. Waiting in lines makes him overthink and stress, and people staring at him only makes it worse for both of us.”
- “A simple haircut can be a major stressor for someone with cognitive or physical disabilities. Loud noises from hair dryers and strong smells can be overwhelming for a person with autism, and accessibility barriers make it tough for those in wheelchairs.”
- “My son is very loud, and I sometimes wish there was a special corner where we could sit so we wouldn’t disturb others or feel self-conscious.”
- “I wish businesses would engage with my son directly instead of ignoring him.”
- “Patience is key. Letting individuals place their own orders rather than assuming a guardian needs to speak for them makes a huge difference.”

By integrating simple yet meaningful accommodations, businesses can create a more inclusive environment.

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By implementing supportive practices, your business can greatly improve the quality of life for individuals with disabilities.

Small yet impactful changes foster an inclusive environment where they and their families feel welcomed, valued, and respected. Accessibility isn't just about compliance—it's about building a community where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

RESTAURANTS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer call-ahead seating options to reduce wait times for families with individuals with disabilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Train staff to engage directly with individuals with disabilities rather than assuming the caregiver will speak for them.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide sensory kits with noise-canceling headphones, fidget tools, and sunglasses upon request. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer picture-based or digital menus for non-verbal individuals to aid in communication.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer special seating arrangements, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quieter tables in the back for those with sensory sensitivities. Tables near exits for individuals with mobility challenges. 	
HOTELS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow families to request specific accommodations such as first-floor rooms, rooms near elevators, or quieter sections of the hotel. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If the hotel has a restaurant, provide call-ahead seating options to reduce wait times.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide sensory kits at the front desk upon request. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Train staff in disability etiquette to ensure a welcoming experience for all guests.

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Able Together

Developmental Disabilities

Awareness Month



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FOOD RETAIL / GROCERY STORES	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer express checkout for families shopping with individuals with disabilities to reduce overstimulation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement sensory-friendly shopping hours with reduced lighting, no music, and minimal PA announcements.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a designated quiet/calm room for individuals who may become overwhelmed by bright lights, loud noises, or crowds. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train cashiers and staff to be patient and accommodating, ensuring individuals can interact at their own pace.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide carts or baskets with adaptive handles for individuals with mobility challenges. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer adapted curriculum and individualized support for children and adults with disabilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designate a quiet room for individuals needing a break from large-group settings.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide reserved seating options for families needing special accommodations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train clergy and volunteers on how to support individuals with diverse needs.
BARBERSHOPS / BEAUTY SALONS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer sensory kits with fidget tools, weighted lap pads, and noise-canceling headphones. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure accessibility by using styling chairs that accommodate individuals with mobility challenges.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide weighted blankets to help calm individuals with sensory sensitivities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train staff on disability awareness, including how to interact with non-verbal individuals.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Display visual guides or social stories explaining the haircut process to ease anxiety. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer appointment times when the shop is quieter for those sensitive to noise and crowds.

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GYMS & FITNESS CENTERS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide weekly adaptive fitness classes for individuals with physical or developmental disabilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create designated quiet workout areas for those who may be overwhelmed by loud music or bright lights.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train staff to assist individuals with varying mobility levels and communication needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop social stories or instructional videos to help individuals understand how to use gym equipment.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer accessible gym equipment and modify routines as needed. 	
ENTERTAINMENT VENUES (MOVIE THEATERS, ARCADES, PLAY CENTERS, ETC.)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer sensory-friendly movie screenings with reduced volume and dim lighting instead of complete darkness. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide noise-reducing headphones and fidget tools at the front desk.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designate specific hours for sensory-sensitive play, limiting bright lights and loud sounds. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow re-entry for individuals who may need a break during an event.
RETAIL & SHOPPING CENTERS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train staff on how to engage with customers with disabilities respectfully and inclusively. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Install accessible fitting rooms with extra space and seating for caregivers.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide sensory-friendly shopping hours. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure clear, wide aisles to accommodate mobility devices.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer personal shopping assistance for individuals who may need extra support. 	