



Autism's special design requirements

Many autistic children are highly sensitive to the sight, sound and feel of their environment. Therefore, autism-friendly spaces need to pay close attention to texture, uniformity, acoustics, and lighting conditions.

Specifically, for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) patients:

- Excess noise can be at best distracting and at worst, sensory overload. Therefore, window and door solutions need to have sound-dampening capabilities.
- Care should be taken to reduce any sounds, rattles, and related noises. This eliminates blinds, curtains and exterior shades as privacy solutions.
- Insulation from other noises in the environment (traffic, for example) is important for similar reasons.
- Indirect lighting should be used, and lighting needs to be adjustable to ensure protection from over-bright lights and glare – both of which can be distressing to ASD patients.
- Uniformity of textures and design can help create a soothingly consistent environment.

By way of example, the Bethesda – Niagara Family Center has provided a wide range of support and services to individuals with special needs in the Niagara region. As

the number of children diagnosed with an ASD and other developmental disabilities in the region increases, Bethesda's service mandates continue to grow. To better address this burgeoning need, Bethesda recently opened its new Family Centre in Thorold, Ontario.

To ensure an optimally ASD-sensitive privacy solution, architects selected Unicel's Vision Control® integrated louvers. The door and sidelite Vision Control® units are ideal for limiting noise and distractions from the corridor areas for children in therapy. Vision Control® units vastly improve the therapy environment by enabling easy and more effective privacy and lighting controls. The perfectly aligned internal louvers ensure a calming visual uniformity and are operated soundlessly. Vision Control® units in openings between rooms allow parents to discreetly monitor their child's progress with therapists, without the child feeling observed.

The 27,000-square-foot facility now welcomes children diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder, along with their families, into the new two-storey building.

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