

Managing different priorities

In some homes, there are many things that can be done to make the space more neuroinclusive. We asked Jayde how she helps people prioritize and figure out what is most important for them.

Jayde:

I think it primarily depends on the client, right? Of course, I have to consider who builds and uses the space. For example, a retirement home would have very different priorities per se than a family home or a private client with a house or a condo versus developer building, multi-unit residential buildings. I also gauge between how keen they are to create beautifully inclusive spaces. Are they simply looking for basic compliance for funding? Or is it someone who's excited and engaged with the process and the outcome? Every client has a different goal or desired result which may or may not align with accessibility, inclusivity, and universal design. And of course, that includes, you know, the neurodivergence but I have to meet them where they are, and I have to encourage them to go further, where possible.

I would say that I'd start by covering the basics and make sure as a 1st step they meet basic accessibility code for the jurisdiction. So things like are the doors wide enough? Is there barrier-free, no step entrance? What kind of hardware do they have on doors and cabinets? How about maneuverability? So we know this, but basic code almost never includes diverse or neurodiverse disabilities, so I always encourage them to do better than code. And this is where we bring universal and neuroinclusive design into play. Every day I'm reminded that change for accessibility moves slowly, and that every step we can take to improve things, of course, is a step in the right direction. So hopefully the building code will catch up with that. But I look at safety. Every space needs to be safe. We have to think of the human errors that we make, all things that can go wrong, both accidental and intentional and try to negate things that could potentially harm somebody. So we're paying attention to things like edges, drops headspace, contrast railing steers, things that may burn someone as you mentioned the stove, those that's a big one. But beyond that, I like to look at signage and wayfinding right again. This this keeps coming back. I think that they're super important in and outdoors from parking to elevators, directions, suites, house numbers, safety warnings, instructions, really paying attention, that things are clear and easy to read, they have multiple formats, things like the font type and size, legibility, color, contrast, wording braille, tactile symbols and imagery are all on this list.

I think, then I look at parking. We've failed if someone can't easily and safely get in and out of a building independently. So can somebody reasonably get from a vehicle or bus to the building, to the elevator, to the suite safely, without barriers. And of course this includes senses. If somebody's noisy in a hallway at 2am. How will that transmit someone who's in bed in their suite? Will they feel safe? Will they feel secure? And how does that impact their mental health, right? Of course we need to think of that. And what if somebody is maybe in their suite or in the hallway, and they're stimming and making noise, will they get complaints? Will they be evicted, right? And then the next space I would always look at are kitchens and washrooms. This is one of the most important. These are the most important spaces that can make or break a home. So I always think about smells and sounds from cooking, which can be huge sensory nightmares for people not only within their own suite but also for their neighbors. I once lived next door to someone who cooked a specific food with a very strong aroma, and I won't say what it was she would do so about every weekend, and she would open her apartment door wide, because, of course, the smell was really strong, and the vent above

her stoves didn't vent outside, it just recirculated the air. So what that meant was, we had all of the noise and none of the benefit of actually removing the smells, and it was terrible. So you know, exhaust fans that are quiet and vented outside can really help keep tenants happy. Lighting, you know, I kind of mentioned lighting earlier, but just making sure that people can choose the type of lighting that works best for them. It helps with a lot of different areas of neurodivergence for sure.

And I also kind of wanted to mention executive dysfunction. Cooking can be a really big challenge for people with disabilities. So anything we can do to make it easier is always good. So a simple thing in the design choice is the magic triangle layout, which essentially means that each appliance is at a point within a triangle. and then we have countertops hopefully on at least one of the sides between 2 points. We can also round the edges of corners, excuse me, round the edges and corners of counters. This is a big one. A lot of people with neurodiversity have something that we call postural sway. When we walk around things, we tend to sort of flow around them in an interesting way. If you've never seen that you should Google it but sometimes it means we crash into them. I miscalculate things a fair bit, and I always have bruises, and I'm like, where did I get that bruise? So rounding those corners that stick out on things like breakfast bars, islands, or counters can really save us a lot of pain. So that kind of also comes into safety. Toileting, bathing, I think, is my last note. We can always include things like heat lamps above or beside the shower or bath. So those who don't like to use towels, or take maybe a little bit longer to dry, have the comfort of using that warming lamp to dry faster, more comfortably. Dimmable lights again, and I love having dimmable lights actually above or in the shower or bath that's separate from the fan and other lights. One of my biggest pet peeves is when the light and the fan are tied together. I don't know if you've ever experienced this, but when the light is on, the bathroom fan is automatically on, and I think it's a terrible assault on those who struggle with noise. So, having the bathroom light and fan function independently from each other is super important, and I could go on. But yeah. So I would say safety, usability of kitchen and bathroom. And you know, just paying attention to the senses again, the sight, the sound, the smell, the movement, the flow.