

Building Homes That Work

The early stages of a housing project are full of possibility. Whether it's building something new or updating an existing space, it's an ideal time to think about neuroinclusivity and how thoughtful design choices can support people at the start.

This section offers ideas for engaging the neurodivergent community in the process, along with creative approaches to designing both shared and personal spaces.

SECTION THEMES:

- 09 **Learning about neuroinclusive housing**
- 16 **Designing shared spaces**
- 19 **Designing personal spaces that meet individual needs**



Learning about neuroinclusive housing

Here we offer ideas for how people can connect, share ideas, and come up with thoughtful design choices for both shared spaces and individual homes.

Connect early with the people who will live there to get their input



Inclusivity: The principle of “nothing about us, without us” means asking, listening, and co-designing with the Neurodivergent people who will live in the space.



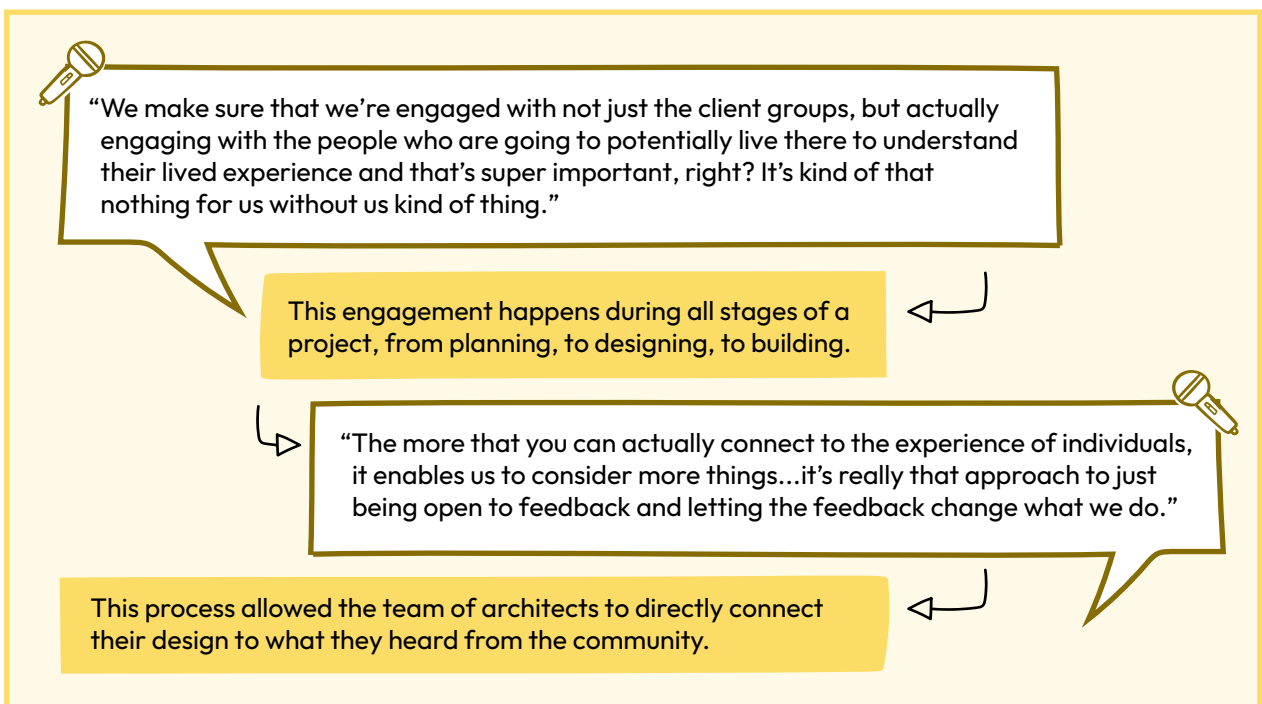
Insight: We heard that the earlier Neurodivergent people’s voices are brought into the conversations for new construction projects or renovations, the easier it is to build a home that fits.



Tip: Make opportunities for people to share their thoughts in different ways and more than once. Options might include hosting recurring town hall forums, offering online and paper feedback forms, having in-person chats, or making a dedicated a phone line.




Example: We spoke with architects who told us how important it is to involve Neurodivergent people early in the planning process so that their real-life experiences can help shape the design.



Application: Check out our [Sample Email for Inviting Community Consultations](#). It’s an example of how to welcome neurodivergent voices and plan for accessible options to support participation.

Sample Email for Inviting Community Consultations

New Message

From: Alex Piason - Community Engagement Lead

Subject: You're Invited: Community Town Hall on Our New Housing Project

Dear community members,

We're starting a new residential building in your area, and we want to engage you right from the start. Whether you're interested in living there, know someone who might be, or are simply connected to the neighbourhood, your voice matters.

Join our community town hall to see early plans and share your ideas. Your input will help shape the project.

Town Hall details:

- Who: Anyone in the community who is connected to or interested in the project
- What: Community Town Hall
- When: June 12, 2025, 7:00 pm - 9:00 pm
- Where: Canvas Community Centre, 123 Vinyl Road, Sprouts, Alberta, T4E 7H3
(Virtual meeting option: www.web-meet.ca/3924394)
- Why: To share plans and gather feedback

We recognize that the best results come from including a range of perspectives, especially from those who may live in or near the building. Hearing from a diverse group of people early on helps us catch issues we might not notice and supports design choices that work for as many people as possible. This includes considering different sensory needs, communication styles, and ways people navigate space.


If a town hall isn't your thing, you can also:

- Fill out our online feedback form: www.survey.ca/3924394
- Fill out a paper feedback form at Fresh Homes, 38 Vinyl Road, Sprouts, Alberta, T4E 7N3
- Call us at (780) 392-4394


Please let us know if there are any supports that we can offer to help you take part in this event. We look forward to connecting with you at the town hall.

Best,

Alex Piason
Community Engagement Lead
Fresh Homes
a.piason@freshhomes.ca



Inclusivity: This signals a respectful, curious, and committed approach to co-design. It invites real input, not tokenism, by showing that diverse perspectives create more inclusive designs.



Inclusivity: Not everyone engages the same way. Flexible options and inclusive language help create a space where more people feel comfortable sharing their voice.

Offer tours for people to experience the physical space



Insight: We learned that a tour can be especially helpful for people who need to see or move through a space to understand about how it might work for them. It helps them give more detailed and practical feedback on what needs to be changed.



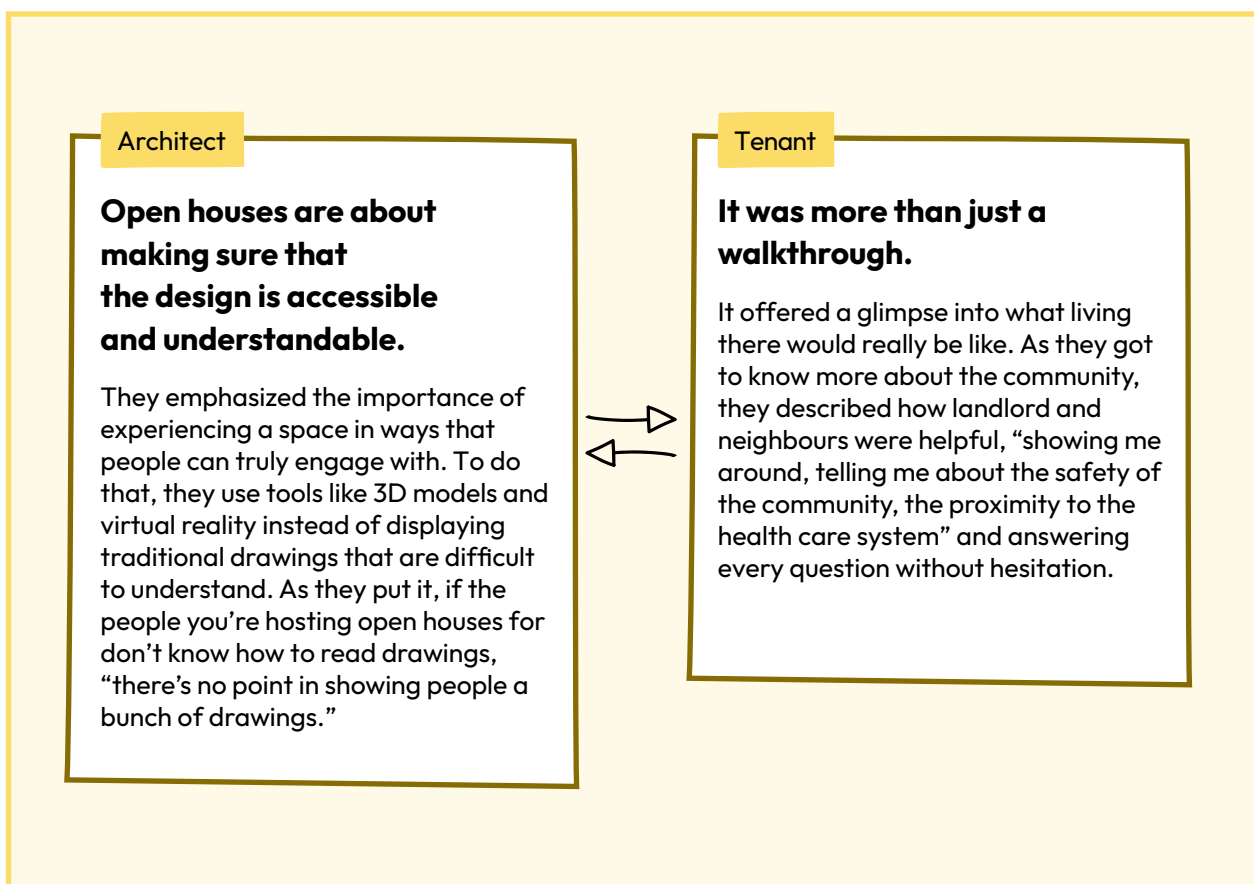
Tip: Show a similar model or layout if the exact home isn't available and explain the differences.



Tip: Create a guide for giving home tours that highlights the important features. Consult with Neurodivergent community members to learn what features they would want to be shown or highlighted.



Example: We heard from both a tenant and an architect that open houses and tours are a key part of how people understand and connect with a space.



Go beyond accessibility building codes and look for neuroinclusive design choices



Inclusivity: Meeting basic accessibility codes is just the starting point. There are many other design choices that make spaces more inclusive and welcoming. Review the current plans. Think who might still be left out and how to adjust the design to make it more accessible.



Tip: Make a short list of organizations or design leaders who focus on neuroinclusion. Follow them on social media, sign up for their newsletters, and explore their projects for inspiration.



Tip: Tour spaces that do neuroinclusive design well and pay attention to things like lighting, signage, entries, exits, shared spaces, quiet zones, or how the space flows.



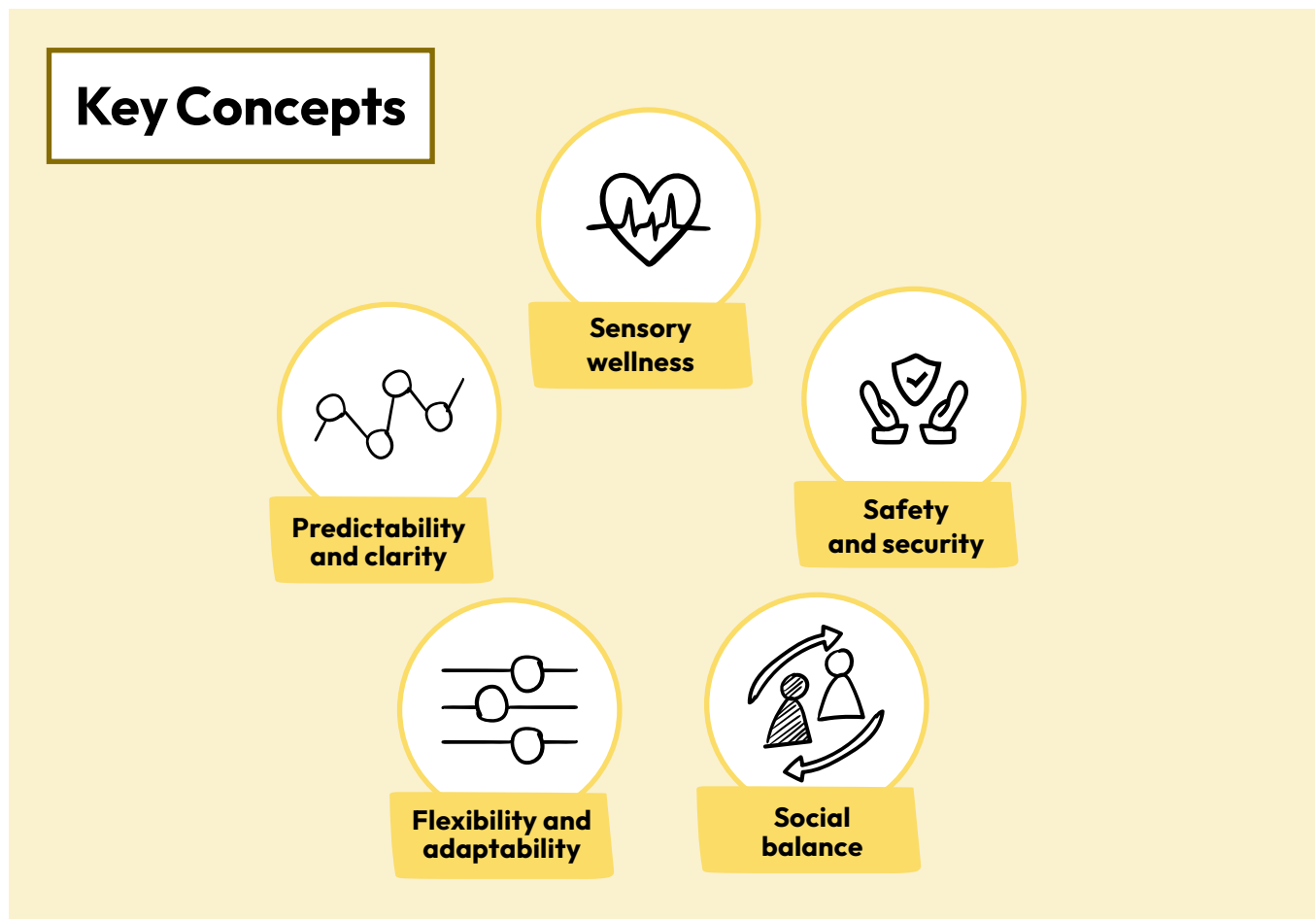
Application: Check out the sample of [Design Guides for Neuroinclusive Housing](#) we've collected.

Design Guides for Neuroinclusive Housing

Here are a few neuroinclusive design guides with ideas to consider when starting a new housing project or modifying existing spaces.

Blueprint for the Mind: Creating Neuroinclusive Architectural Spaces

From Perkins & Will, a global design company, this guide provides a range of neuroinclusive design strategies and ways to implement them, mainly in public spaces and workplaces. It focuses on 5 related concepts of the built environment that can impact Neurodivergent people.



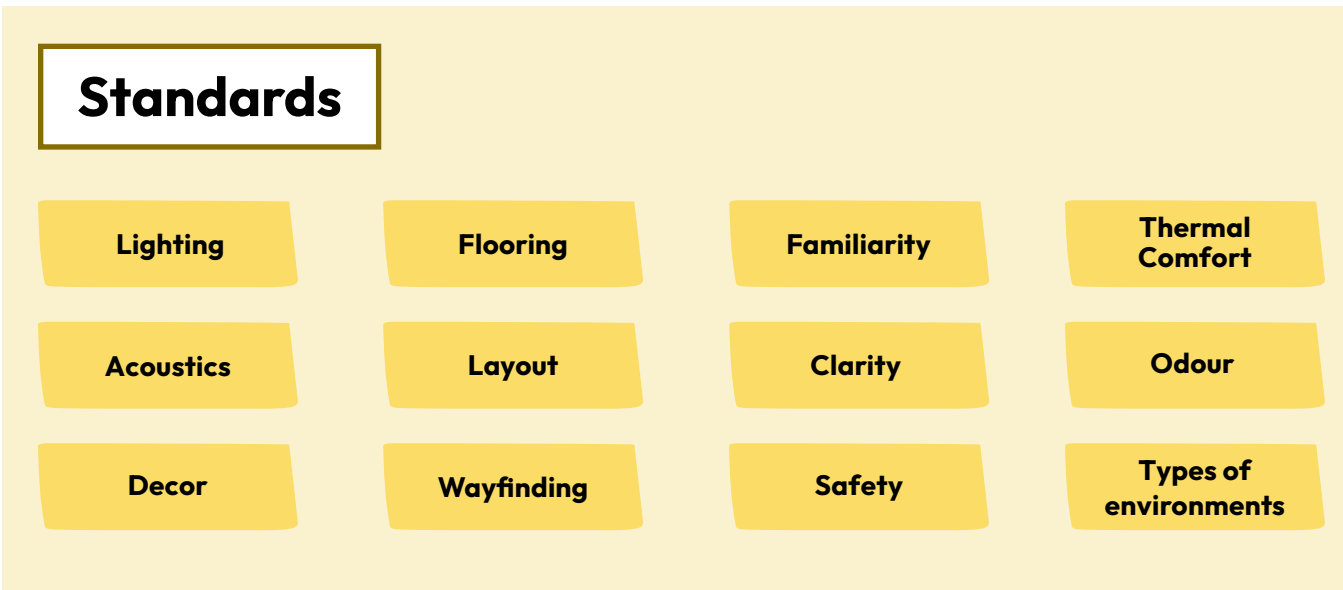
https://issuu.com/perkinswill/docs/neuroinclusion_guide



A related report and Neurodiversity Toolkit focusing more on the workplace might provide more inspiration and can be found on Perkins & Will's website:
<https://research.perkinswill.com/projects/learning-from-biodiversity-to-support-neurodiversity-in-the-workplace/>

Design for the Mind. Neurodiversity & the Built Environment - PAS 6463

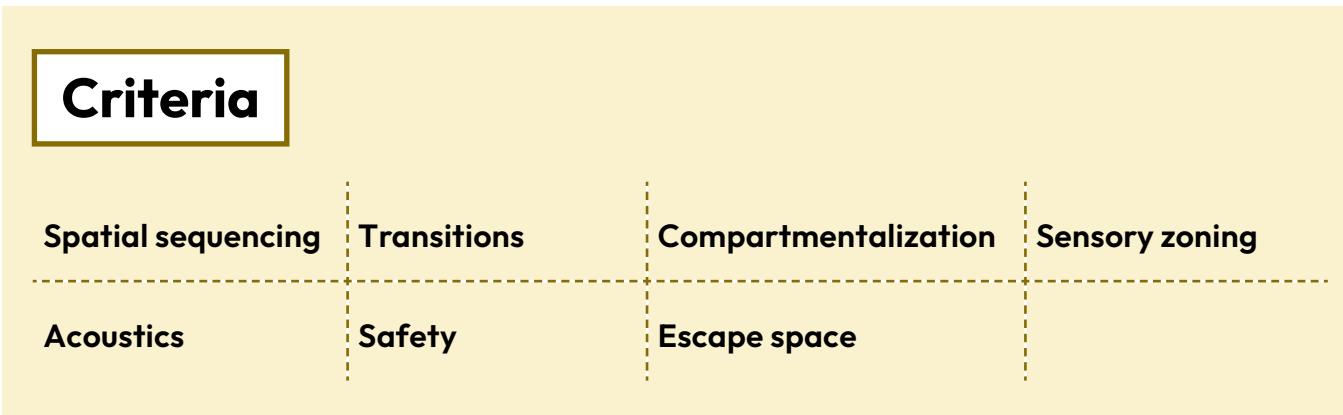
The British Standards Institution published this guide to establish standards of neuroinclusive design that can be used in wide range of spaces like housing, public areas, and businesses.



You'll need to enter some basic contact information to download the guide.
<https://www.bsigroup.com/en-GB/insights-and-media/insights/brochures/pas-6463-design-for-the-mind-neurodiversity-and-the-built-environment/>

The Autism Design Index

This autism focused guide describes 7 important criteria for built environments that can be used to design and assess spaces in homes, schools, and community buildings.



<https://www.autism.archi/aspectss>

Talk about neuroinclusion early and keep it on the agenda



Insight: We learned how easily neuroinclusion can be overlooked. It needs to be discussed at the start and frequently revisited in meeting agendas for any new housing construction or renovation project.



Tip: Invite people to review building or floor plans early and notice things like layout, lighting, or safety, and jot down what feels right or off. These notes can lead to more helpful feedback and spark better questions as plans take shape.



Example: When we spoke with architects about planning for neuroinclusion, one shared that it should be from the very beginning of a project. This architect worked closely with the engineering team on their project to advocate for neuroinclusion at all stages. Because they were involved over time, they designed for neuroinclusion meaningfully, and not just to check a box on accessibility.

They looked to design frameworks and guidelines for neurodiversity to “get a better understanding of how we could integrate that in our process from the beginning to the end rather than something that’s just sent to a third party at certain milestones.”



Designing shared spaces

Whether it's a shared home, a condo, or a multi-unit building, common areas like hallways, patios, pools, gyms, kitchens and so on, need to be designed with care so they feel comfortable and give people options.

Here are some ideas to make shared spaces feel more flexible, calm, and welcoming, allowing for choice in how and when to connect with others.

Use open sightlines in common areas



Insight: We learned that not being able to see what's ahead, like around corners or down hallways, can make people feel anxious or unsafe. Clear sightlines let people know what to expect.



Tip: Design high-traffic areas like entrances and elevator landings with a nearby side paths or quiet seating alcoves to give people a way to step aside of the space feel crowded or overwhelming.



Application: Check out the sample of [Design Guides for Neuroinclusive Housing](#) we've collected. Find it on page 13.

Make it easy to get around



Inclusivity: Good wayfinding supports independence, lowers cognitive load, and helps people feel more confident as they move through a building, and get where they need to go.



Tip: Design pathways with clear signage, lighting, and layouts to easily guide people to important areas like exits, elevators, and washrooms.



Tip: Use clear and consistent signage. Think about size, placement, symbols, contrast, and plain language.



Tip: Try painting wayfinding cues like arrows, right on the walls or floors. It's a simple and effective strategy that's used in many settings.



Tip: Offer building maps or floor plans ahead of time, so people can see the space in advance and feel more prepared and confident getting around. It can reduce stress, especially in large or unfamiliar spaces.

Offer different levels of engagement and sensory input



Inclusivity: Shared spaces can help people feel connected, but not everyone wants social interaction all the time. It's important to create environments that support different comfort levels, sensory needs, and energy levels.



Tip: Design shared spaces like patios, gyms, or pools with possibilities for both connection and quiet. Include spots for socializing and areas for alone time, so people can choose how they want to engage.



Tip: Schedule times for specific use of spaces, such as low light, reduced capacity, or open conversation hours.



Example: We spoke with a few designers about how fixtures and furniture could change spaces from being more open and social versus more private.

They talked about having a mix of seating options with one designer describing a modular couch that transforms into different arrangements depending on what's needed for the people and space.

We also heard about using planters, pergolas, or benches to create natural separation between social and private spaces.



Application: Check out our [Tips for Creating Neuroinclusive Spaces That Support Participation](#) for ideas.

Tips for Creating Neuroinclusive Spaces That Support Participation

We made a list of ideas and tips shared by Neurodivergent people for creating neuroinclusive spaces that foster participation and inclusion.

It can be a starting point for designing, building, or renovating spaces. It can also be used for hosting activities and gatherings.

Try incorporating some of these tips:

1

Offer alternatives to verbal participation.

Virtual chat features, sticky notes, and art-based options like drawing, painting, or music are options that are inclusive of diverse communication and participation styles.

2

Before the event or gathering, share written and visual agendas.

People can review information beforehand and know what to expect.

3

Plan for various sensory needs.

Creating sensory zones within a space or activity provides choice.

Remember to include options for sensory seekers too.

4

Share walkthrough videos and photos of the space.

People can navigate the space with more familiarity when they arrive.

5

Invite people to unmask and show up as their authentic selves.

People appreciate it when the aim is to make safer spaces where everyone is welcome.

6

Discuss and post visible guidelines or “ground rules”.

This reduces the pressure to navigate and interpret unspoken expectations and social norms.

Ask Neurodivergent people what helps them feel supported and like they belong. They are the experts of their own experiences, and their feedback is valuable. The key is to create a space where they feel safe sharing honestly.

Designing personal spaces that meet individual needs

For many Neurodivergent people, sensory needs are a big part of whether or not a space feels safe, calm, and livable. These needs vary from person to person and even from day to day.

Here we offer ideas for how to create a flexible home environment where people can choose and control elements to match their needs.

Make thoughtful material choices



Insight: We heard that the right materials not only make a space more comfortable, but they also make cleaning easier, reduce upkeep, and minimize unpleasant sensory experiences.



Tip: Make cleaning easier by selecting durable and easy-to-clean materials and finishes. Try:

- Spot-free appliances and fixtures
- Non-carpeted flooring
- Toilets that flush well the first time
- Cabinets with adjustable organizers



Tip: Reduce strong odours and improve air quality. Try:

- Paints that don't release gases into the air
- Good ventilation systems that improve clean air circulation
- Cabinets and furniture made without harsh glues or chemicals

Create ways for people to control their own lighting



Insight: We learned that many people have sensory needs related to brightness, colour, and types of lighting.



Tip: Use adjustable features like dimmers or smart bulbs so people can set the lighting level that works for them.

Design with sound and acoustics in mind



Tip: Try designing with materials like acoustic panels, soft furnishings, insulation, or carpets to reduce echo and background noise.



Tip: Try pairing devices to headphones or hearing aids for individualized volume control.

Offer ways to adjust temperature



Tip: Use zoned heating and cooling systems so people can control the temperature in different parts of the home.



Tip: Have fans, baseboard heaters, or windows that open to give people more control over airflow and temperature.



Tip: Place hooks around the home so extra clothing layers are always easy to reach when needed.



Application: Check out our menu of options for [Modifying Spaces for Sensory Needs](#), with many ideas of small, low-cost changes that make spaces more comfortable and accessible for different sensory profiles.

Modifying Spaces for Sensory Needs

We learned that small changes to a space can go a long way in making it more inclusive. Being mindful of different sensory needs and recognizing that these can change from day to day is an important part of accessibility. There are many ways to adjust a space to feel more calming or more engaging. Below, we've created a short "menu" of options to explore.

The most important strategy shared with us was to try different things and figure out what aligns with preferences and the unique environment.

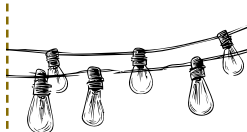
Light: Change the type of lighting, brightness, or colour.



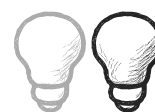
Motion sensing



Colour LED



String light



Dimmable light



Double layer curtain



Blackout curtain



Bubble tube light



Wall light



Table lamp



Sunglasses

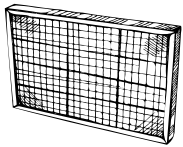


Black tape seal around windows



Cardboard over windows

Sound: Use technology or do-it-yourself options to dampen or increase acoustics in your home



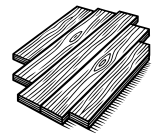
Foam Panels



Static sound makers



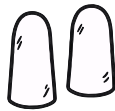
Noise-cancelling headphones



Wooden wall panels



Headphones for music



Earplugs



Wall tapestries



Noise machines



Live plant wall

Motion: Find fixtures that can give a sense of movement



Sensory ball



Rocking chair



Indoor or outdoor swing

Temperature: Use technology or do-it-yourself options to set up temperature-controlled zones in the home



Smart thermostat



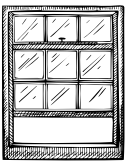
Portable fan



Extra throws or blankets



Heated pads or blankets



Plastic wrap over windows

Touch: Put in a variety of textured elements in the home



Plush blankets



Textured pillows



Weighted blanket



Textured rugs



Humidifier or dehumidifier



Adjustable shower nozzles



Beanbag chair