

GUIDANCE: QUIET ROOM DESIGN

WHAT IS A QUIET ROOM?

Autistic colleagues and visitors will greatly benefit from being provided a private, dedicated quiet room that is easily and discretely accessible in times when they are overwhelmed and highly anxious. Quiet rooms should not only provide respite from busy and sensory intrusive environments, but importantly, somewhere where autistic people can perform calming, self-soothing and self-regulating activities away from public gaze and interruption.

Considerate design of quiet spaces and rooms means that autistic people have a calm place that can be accessed quickly, to desensitise and calm down in when needed and are able to spend more time and be more productive on-site after 're-setting.'

CAN I USE MY EXISTING PRAYER, WELLBEING, NURSING MOTHERS OR FIRST AID ROOM AS A QUIET ROOM?

The short answer is no: We recommend that careful consideration is given to whether the rooms proposed for quiet room environments are truly sensory-neutral and private. Nursing mother rooms, first aid and prayer rooms are often occupied at certain times of the day and needed urgently by others, which defeats the purpose of quiet rooms. Intrusive (not neutral) sensory sources include (but are not limited to):

- air fresheners/soaps/cleaning products/room scents and diffusers
- bright colours and 'fussy' décor
- uncomfortable seating or seating too close together
- scratchy textures and fabrics
- white or high-glare (glossy) surfaces
- uncontrollable 'human' noise
- mobile phone ring tones, alerts and vibrations
- artificial overhead lighting
- bright sunlight
- non-adjustable heating/cooling
- draughts
- heavy footfall outside
- being able to be overheard or seen when performing self-calming actions
- vibration from devices or machinery
- 'blue' light commonly found in white LED lamps

WHAT ARE THE BASIC ELEMENTS OF A GOOD QUIET ROOM?

Quiet rooms can be any size, or even a private work pod, but should provide enough space to lie down in comfortably. They should be sensory-neutral and private, meaning that the following sensory aspects should be non-intrusive, neutralised and eliminated.

- odours
- lighting, glints and glares
- textures
- temperature
- vibration
- external and internal noise
- colour schemes

The walls and doors of well-designed quiet rooms should be opaque (not able to see through at all), and any windows furnished with screens or adjustable blinds, as well as equipment to adjust the temperature quickly if needed. We recommend that only 'warm' light lamps are used in any lighting and that the lighting is dimmable.

Quiet rooms should not be accessible by anyone who does not need to use them so that they are available for those that need them as 'instantly' as possible and without challenge. We recommend as a guide that one quiet room is provided per 100 people, or alternatively there should be at least one quiet room on each floor of a building designed to provide work-spaces for no more than 150 people. This allows people to quickly move either one floor above or below if the quiet room on their current floor is occupied. Rooms should be provided with obvious and clear 'occupied' or 'do not disturb' signage on the door, so that people who are unable to share with someone are accommodated or can find an alternative space if one is unavailable for sole use.

Comfortable seating should be provided and enough space to lie down on the floor when needed. We recommend carpeting the floor, which helps with absorbing sound and also provides a soft surface to lie on. You may want to add soft furnishings, oversized pillows with soft textures and throws for comfort. You should risk assess your quiet room for hazards such as cross contamination of virus' and bacteria that could cause illness and prepare a robust inspection and cleaning schedule. You may also like to provide sensory lights and sounds that can be switched off or on depending on the user's particular needs and preferences. Finally, we recommend that if you are providing any fidget items, that they do not have any porous surfaces and can be sanitised with alcohol wipes before use.

We can provide a risk assessment for you, and advise on retrofitting existing spaces to a quiet room by emailing info@autentic.uk