Sensory-Friendly Bedroom Ideas for Kids of All Ages

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Everyone needs a space to call their own, a place that's tailored to their preferences and individual needs. That's especially true for children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The way in which their brains process information makes them more likely to experience sensory overload. While every child is different, there are some basic ways parents can make the bedroom a refuge from the sensory storm.

Calming Colors

Color has a powerful impact on the mind. It can invigorate or soothe, increase the heart rate or reduce blood pressure. For children with ASD, you also have to think about how that color will appear and feel at night.

In general, neutrals and pastels are the least stimulating. Grays, beiges, and silver are easy on the eyes and brain. For a calming effect, look to the cool side of the colour wheel—blue, green, purple. Earthy tones of brown are a good choice too. But it’s not just the colour. It’s also the shade and depth too. Pastels are easy on the eyes, but depending on how much light enters the room, they could reflect too much light.

Light is a key factor in the timing and success of the sleep cycle. During the day, sunlight suppresses sleep hormones. Any light in the bedroom at night can have a similar effect even light reflected off the walls. Consider a darker shade of a cool colour if the bedroom gets a lot of natural light. Walls that absorb rather than reflect light can tone down the visual stimulation.

Controlled Lighting

While we’re talking about light, carefully consider all light sources in the bedroom. We’ve already gone over wall colour, but windows, skylights, and artificial lights will determine how that colour is perceived.

Use a combination of blackout curtains and blinds to completely block moonlight, streetlight, or light

from passing cars. Use a motion-activated nightlight so there's no light unless your child needs to use the bathroom. Consider using an alarm clock that mimics natural sunlight to gradually awaken your child in the morning.

Nighttime Pressure

Weighted blankets can be helpful for some ASD children. They apply deep pressure that's naturally calming. A good rule of thumb is to use a weighted blanket that's 10 per cent of the child's body weight plus one pound.

Regular blankets can also be a tool to help children remain calm and comfortable. The soft texture and familiarity can make the bedroom feel welcoming and safe. Keep patterns and colours to a minimum and muted. Avoid reds, oranges, and yellows because they can be overstimulating.

Reduce Clutter

Stick to the less is more principle in the bedroom. Clutter can trigger anxiety in almost anyone, whether or not they have ASD. A sturdy bed, dresser, and a desk for studying may be all your child needs.

Keep the room organization simple. Everything doesn't necessarily need to be sorted at the end of the day. It just needs a place so the room is clear of distraction come bedtime. Try to make it easy for your child to participate in cleaning and maintaining the room. Bins, tubs, or baskets to store toys or school supplies can keep clutter from accumulating.

The Takeaway

A sensory-friendly bedroom is one that focuses solely on the needs of the child. A room that reduces visual stimulation through colour, lighting, and furniture choice is one that promotes healthy sleep. Sleep may still be a challenge, but if the room is sensory-friendly, you've set the stage for success.

This article was written for Living Autism by https://familylivingtoday.com

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