

RELAXED PEFORMANCES

Relaxed performances are where the production is modified slightly to cater to an audience of people who have sensory processing difficulties.

Relaxed performances are put in place for those who will benefit from a more relaxed environment. Common triggers for people on the autistic spectrum are darkness, loud noises and music, and in general just an unfamiliar environment that you are expected to sit still and quietly in for a long time.

What are the types of changes that can be made?

Lights

During a relaxed performance it is normal for the house lights to not go all the way down. Sometimes the aisles and stairs will remain slightly lit to help people who might want to leave during the performance.

Auditorium Doors

Normally it becomes an open door showing. This means people have freedom to go in and out of the auditorium during the performance.

Sound Volume

The volume of the whole show is usually reduced slightly so there aren't any sudden loud noises

Character/Actor Association

At the start of the relaxed showing some of the actors, dressed as their characters, come out and introduce themselves and who they are playing. This can help the audience members if they get scared or stressed to remember that they are just actors playing a role.

Chill out areas

Theatres will set up a quiet area somewhere, usually in the theatre auditorium, for members of the audience to go if they are feeling overwhelmed.

Free of Judgment

The most important part of a relaxed performance is that involuntary noises from audience members are welcomed free of judgement.

This can be distracting for the performers which is why they must be aware of who they they are performing to at a relaxed showing.

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Audience members attending a relaxed performance will usually be sent a 'visual story' of the production before the performance. This will include:



Photos of the theatre so they know what to expect. The entrance, the foyer area, toilets, auditorium, the bar etc



A description of the show they booked a ticket to go and see.

Some shows that might have a scary moment could send a production photo of that scene. Neurologically diverse people don't worry about 'spoilers', if anything they want to know what to expect.



A breakdown of what their theatre trip could involve

This will include a description of how long the first half is, what they can do in the interval (what flavours or ice cream are available for more detail), how long it is and how long the last half is.

The whole point of the visual story is to make the audience familiar with the venue before they visit it. This is to reduce the stress they might feel going somewhere new for the first time.

Naoki Higashida, a young man with autism, described a need for routine and familiarity like the longing to see a familiar face in a crowd and new place in the book "The Reason I Jump". If they are aware of what to expect and can recognise the new place they are in from the picture then they might feel more calm and able to process their thoughts and surrounding.

This is why it is very important to make sure the photos of your venue are up to date and accurate.

Visit Mousetrap Theatre Projects for more information about relaxed performances.

<https://www.mousetrap.org.uk/relaxed>