

Mermaid Theatre of Nova Scotia
Relaxed Performances - Information Sheet
("Sensory Friendly" or "Autism Friendly" Performances)



Mermaid Theatre of Nova Scotia can present most of our shows as “relaxed performances.” With advance notice, the company and venue can make some simple modifications to accommodate a variety of special needs audiences.

Mermaid’s productions are gentle; they feature NO flashing or strobe lights, sudden volume increases or loud noises. All of our productions feature straight readings of the adapted storybooks, with no added narration or dialogue, so children who already know the stories will be very familiar with the material, which can help ease anxiety. Mermaid also introduces every performance as a “non-shushing” show, so audiences are not discouraged from vocalizing or helping to tell the stories as they unfold.

While some of Mermaid’s productions are “black-light” shows that require a darkened house, we can accommodate these shows by keeping house lights on at a suitable low level. The touring company and the venue can determine how best to balance the needs of the audience and the show at setup.

Recommendations for Venue Support

EDUCATE FRONT OF HOUSE PERSONNEL:

- Appoint knowledgeable, compassionate volunteers in key locations to help guide patrons to where they need to go (box office, theater, concessions, restrooms, break areas) and to field questions.
- Set-up the box office and lobby to maximize crowd flow

START WITH SMALLER NUMBERS (large crowds and packed spaces can spark anxiety):

- Think about the layout and size of the venue and determine how patrons with disabilities will comfortably fit in and easily navigate the lobby, walkways/stairwells and theater space.

CONSIDER UNIQUE NEEDS OF THE AUDIENCE:

- Start the performance on time
- Before the performance starts and throughout, keep the house lights lit at a low level
- Provide a clear 'exit strategy' (to aid with prompt departure if necessary)
- Offer tactile objects or "fidgets" for theatergoers
- Establish quiet seating areas outside of the performance space with calming activities (puzzles, crafts, sensory play)
- Set up a monitor near the quiet seating area so those needing to be outside the auditorium can still keep up with the performance

Show Adaptations

- Adjust house lighting to a suitable level. Upon consultation with the stage manager, ideal house lighting levels can be set, with a maximum level identified if more light is needed.
- Lower maximum volume level if required
- For sign-language performances, the interpreter can be off to one side and lit with a “special” blue gel. A copy of the script is available in advance for preparation use.
- Post-show Q&A can be modified to avoid surprises (i.e. “black light” demonstration will not involve complete darkening of the house during post-show.)

If you have any other questions, please contact us at puppets@mermaidtheatre.ca or 902-798-5841.