

WILSON
KROGER
CLINIC

Sensory-Friendly
Performances
Volunteer Training

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W e l c o m e

- Introductions
- Land Acknowledgement
- Housekeeping

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We collectively acknowledge that Michigan State University occupies the ancestral, traditional, and contemporary Lands of the Anishinaabeg – Three Fires Confederacy of Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi peoples. In particular, the University resides on Land ceded in the 1819 Treaty of Saginaw. We recognize, support, and advocate for the sovereignty of Michigan’s twelve federally-recognized Indian nations, for historic Indigenous communities in Michigan, for Indigenous individuals and communities who live here now, and for those who were forcibly removed from their Homelands. By offering this Land Acknowledgement, we affirm Indigenous sovereignty and will work to hold Michigan State University more accountable to the needs of American Indian and Indigenous peoples.

Locations of bathrooms, coffee and water

Questions on zoom can be put in the chat or using the raise hand function. Please keep your microphone muted.

The need to stand, stretch, etc is always welcome. I will do my best to describe any images that are on the slides.

Introduction to Sensory-Friendly Performances at Wharton Center

- A brief history
- What SFPs are, vs what they aren't
- Typical SFP modifications and experiences
- Volunteer roles and duties

Wharton began our SFP journey in the fall of 2016 with a production of a new musical based on the life and work of Dr Temple Grandin. Our first major event was Disney's the Lion King in the summer of 2018. We have branched out into 2-4 SFPs per season, working to attract patrons of all ages and interests. This season we are focused more on musical performances, with the Okee Dokee brothers, Celtic musicians Natalie McMaster and Donell Leahy, and play with music Cross That River.

SFPs are shows with slight modifications to welcome those who find general performances overstimulating. This can be due to a large number of factors, including ASD, sensory processing disorders, PTSD, dementia and other memory disorders, and aversion due to large crowds. We find our SFPs are also a wonderful chance for families to introduce young children to the theatre in a lower-pressure setting. SFPs are not only aimed for young people, patrons with Autism, and they are not watered-down, over-simplified versions of our offerings. It's our goal to never change the art, merely change the opportunities for experience.

Typically, SFPs run an hour long and are scheduled as matinee performances. We do work with our artists to lessen any startling noises or drastic light changes, or we notify the audiences in advance when they will be. We leave the house lights up so that the theatre isn't totally dark, and we welcome patrons to stand, stretch, vocalize, and leave their seat if

needed. Food, drink, and personal comfort items (including phones and tablets) are welcome in the theatre. Outside of the theatre, there are alternate spaces to watch the production (on a tv screen, with comfortable seating), there are activities to partake in, and there are calm spaces that are lower-sensory. Fidgets are present to borrow, and noise-cancelling headphones are available to check out.

We work to keep ticket prices lower, and we have a lenient cancelation/refund policy for when patrons aren't able to make the performances.

Most importantly, there's you- our trained volunteers to assist patrons, answer questions, and be a friendly face. Volunteers perform a wide range of functions, but first and foremost we're an extension of our terrific front of house team (they'll speak more later). Volunteers are assigned to a general area, where they will be available for questions, and offer up support. We place those who have more training/experience, called our "Experts" in areas we designate as possible high traffic, have the possibility for more noise, or there are features like stairs or outside exits that our patrons should be aware of. These experts will also be available for volunteers to call for assistance if a situation gets beyond their control (i.e. a meltdown). Our staff of ushers is also trained in a wide variety of patron services, so if anything comes up that is out of your scope of knowledge, please ask them for assistance.

Current Best Practices

- Source
- Always honor the request of the patron
- Language
 - Person First vs Identity First
 - Neurodivergent vs Neurodiversity
 - Avoid euphemisms and pejorative terms
 - Avoid victimizing language
 - Remember that no one is perfect. We're all learning and striving to do our best.

These best practices come from a combination of experts in the field and people with disabilities. These are always changing, and we work from a stance of always learning. In this spirit, we honor the requests and patrons of each patron individually to the best of our abilities.

Person first language- identify the person before their disability. I.e., a person with autism, not an autistic person. Note that many people with disabilities are moving toward identity-first language, as they feel they do not separate from their conditions.

Neurodivergent refers to the person, neurodiversity refers to the population. Note that some alternatives to this are neuromajority and neurominority, to remove the idea of "typical" from the conversation.

Common terms are "special needs" "differently abled" "handicapable" – remember that disabled and disability are not bad words. Avoiding using them puts a negative stigma. There are no special needs, they're just needs.

Avoid "suffers from," "wheelchair bound," "hearing impaired" as they automatically attach a negative connotation. Consider "lives with" or "a person with", "uses a wheelchair" and "is deaf/hard of hearing" in those situations. "high-functioning" and "low-functioning." give

folks a blanket term that does not speak to their individual needs.

Best Practices, Continued

- Tips for communicating
 - Address the person directly
 - Speak directly and be an active listener
 - Express boundaries on your own personal space
 - Don't assume disability.
- Wheelchair etiquette
- Blind/low vision etiquette
- Strive for kindness and compassion.

Don't assume that the patron can't or won't understand you. Speak to them, not to their companion.

Avoid slang and euphuisms and give the person plenty of time to respond. Don't talk down to patrons as if they're a child (unless of course they are a child).

Be clear if you don't want physical contact (hugs, etc.) or if you would like a little more space while talking.

Many people with invisible disabilities may not present in a way you expect a disabled person to.

Don't touch or move a chair without permission. It is their equipment and their personal space. If a conversation is going to take more than a few minutes, try to find a space to sit or comfortably get on their level.

For blind/low vision patrons, introduce yourself, use visual descriptions/offer to read, speak at a regular volume, and always offer your arm instead of reaching for theirs.

Accessibility Services at Wharton Center

- ASL
- Open Captioning
- Assisted Listening Devices (ALDs)
- Audio Description
- Sensory Kits
- Large print programs available for WC shows
- All gender restrooms
- Private space
- Curb to Seat Service

ASL Interpretation offered for Broadways when requested 4 weeks in advance and for SFPs.

Open Captioning offered on Thursday performances of Broadways and additional times for multi-week runs.

ALDs can be checked out at Patron services desk with an ID at Wharton Center shows.

Audio description offered for Broadways when requested 4 weeks in advance. Someone describes the visual aspects of the performance and audience members who are blind or low vision that utilize the service listen through an earpiece.

Sensory Kits available for every Wharton Center show. Can be checked out with an ID at the patron services desk, and includes Noise cancelling headphones (small and large), Fidgets/manipulatives, small weighted lap pads

Patrons can also change the size of the font on digital programs

Single stall restrooms located in the Sierra Lobby, restrooms converted to all gender in Christman Lobby for Sensory-Friendly Performances

Private spaces can be accessed for patrons needing space, including nursing parents.

Wharton Center will provide a wheelchair that patrons can use to get into the building and to their seats. It is preferred that you make a request, but we also accommodate walk ups.