

Things to Consider When Designing A Sensory Room

Sensory rooms are “specially designed environments designed to give a sensory experience for people with various abilities.”

Location

Location! Location! Location! When you begin designing your sensory room, the first thing to remember is where you'd like it to be. It is highly advised that the room be “located away from busy thoroughfares where external noise could be an issue.”

Further, you are advised to select a room without windows if possible. Windows are unnecessary and end up being covered with blinds or film, adding to costs. “If daylight and natural ventilation are required, consider an appropriate size window and suitable position.”



Size and Shape

When planning your sensory room, ask yourself, “What do I want to put in the room?” Sensory environments can be as small as a walk-in closet if you only want a space with mesmerizing lights, for example. However, consider a much larger space if you'd like the individual to interact with multiple sensory objects.

Another factor to consider is the shape. For example, if you plan on mounting anything to the walls, you want to avoid circular rooms.



Ventilation, heating, and cooling

Due to the heat from electrical lighting products, you should include an air conditioning unit. Further, “It will be necessary to have a thermostat specifically for this room, as it will require a different setting than surrounding rooms. Without air conditioning, a venting system that allows for an adequate fresh air flow is highly recommended.”

Additionally, adequate heat should also be available in your room. “A properly heated, cooled, and ventilated room helps the user and caregiver focus on the experience and task, not the environmental concerns.”



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Lighting

Speaking of electrical lighting, try to avoid fluorescent lights. Often, fluorescent lights create undesirable noise, which may increase the room's users' stress.

Instead of fluorescent lights, use softer, dimmable spotlights via a switch or a remote.

Floor Covering

There are several types of floor coverings available. Experia states that your floor coverings should depend on what the room is used for, who is using the room, and the overall effect you wish to use. If individuals in wheelchairs will be using the room, consider including a durable floor covering that doesn't stop the wheelchair from moving about.

Further, "a combination of carpets and vinyl floor coverings offer different visual and tactile effects while adding warmth and comfort to a room."

Sound Insulation

Sound insulation helps keep unwanted distractions (noise) from entering or leaving the room. Sound insulation can be achieved in multiple ways:

- Using different materials
- Increasing the thickness of a wall
- Lining walls, internally or externally, with sound-dampening materials

Electrical

If necessary, you can use the existing electrical outlets in the room. However, it is highly advised that you run a separate switched circuit for each product, with the outlets located near each piece of equipment, and the switches located together in an optimal place in the room.

It is advised to do the latter so that you have complete control of the equipment. Doing so also decreases the likelihood of injury due to inquisitive hands.

Colors

Wall color is a personal preference and may vary depending on the room's overall design. Generally speaking, many sensory rooms include projectors with various colors. If this is your case, consider painting a wall off-white or ivory so the projected light is its true color.

"For dark studios where ultraviolet lighting effects are used, we recommend dark colors such as midnight blue or dark green. These dark colors are better for creating a more focused area for fluorescent effects. We prefer these colors to simply black, as they provide the same effect but can be less intimidating to individuals who are new to a dark-room environment."

If you aren't designing a dark room, consider painting different walls with different colors depending on that wall's theme! The resource also suggests using curtains to "create a room within a room."

