



MILLBURN, NEW JERSEY - ESSEX COUNTY

**“THEATRE FOR EVERYONE”  
AUTISM-FRIENDLY PERFORMANCES  
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

**What Can You Expect?**

**You’ll have a theater experience** in which the environment and typical “rules” have been modified to **accommodate** individuals with **autism and other developmental disabilities** and the families and professionals who support them.

In response to and in cooperation with local parents, Paper Mill Playhouse provides live theater performances where all are welcome. Families and classrooms can enjoy theater performances in a comfortable and supported environment.

Expanded pre-performance supports available at [www.papermill.org](http://www.papermill.org), including instructional videos, photographs, and text specifically designed to promote independence and engagement.

**Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about Autism Friendly Performances**

**Q. *Is this performance only for families of children with autism or other developmental disabilities, or can anyone attend?***

**A:** Paper Mill Playhouse strives to provide a judgment-free, comfortable experience for all. Autism Friendly Performances are intended primarily for families with children with autism or other developmental disabilities. All are welcome.

**Q: *What accommodations will there be? How is it different from other performances at Paper Mill Playhouse?***

**A:** The autism-friendly accommodations include:

- Online resource materials: social stories, puzzles, sing-a-long and demonstration videos on [PaperMill.org](http://PaperMill.org)
- BYO reinforcements and motivational systems
- BYO snacks & drinks
- House lights on, but dimmed, inside the theater
- Consistent sound levels and lower volume
- Kids may talk & leave their seat under parental supervision
- New to the theater experience? **“Meet Your Seat!”** before the show – a FREE Open House expressly for children to visit the theater space on another day before the show. (no reservations required)
- The shows run about 1-hour except for main stage shows (3 hrs.)
- Staffed Activity Area with Chill-Out zone provided
- Live simulcasts of the stage show can be seen in lobby and Activity Area
- Select bathrooms designated gender-neutral and family friendly
- On-site behavioral support teams at the ready to assist as needed

**Q: *What support services are available before a performance?***

**A:** Check out [PaperMill.org/Autism Programs](http://PaperMill.org/Autism Programs) for online, downloadable resources:

- Videos and photographs of the premises
- Social stories
- Character Guides
- Materials for motivational systems and activity schedules
- Visual supports (cue cards, request cards)

- **Meet Your Seat!" a FREE Open House** on a day prior to each performance offers an opportunity to visit the theater before the show to become familiar with the space and grounds and to ease transitions. (NO reservation required)

**Q: *Will there be support services at the show?***

**A:** YES! Parents, teachers and support persons are responsible for direct supervision. Trained professionals and volunteers are available to assist:

- With the implementation of your motivational systems
- With transitions in and out of the theater
- In the activity area
- During the performance

**Q: *Will the show on stage be any different from other performances that are not Autism-Friendly?***

**A:** Each show has been reviewed by a panel of specialists to determine the appropriateness of the performance. The most minimal changes will be made to ensure the comfort of this audience. All in all, most theater-goers would not be able to tell that a show has been modified. In addition to content, the amplified audio levels will be tuned to be comfortable and consistent levels, without abrupt spikes in volume or jarring sound effects.

**Q: *Will it be noisy during the show?***

**A:** It's very possible. Expect there to be more than the usual ambient sounds from the audience.

**Q: *Will the theater staff at the show that day be familiar with autism?***

**A:** Yes. Paper Mill Playhouse's experienced staffs (ushers, concession staff) and committed board of directors have received information about autism and strategies for successful inclusion. Trained volunteers are on site to help keep audience members engaged and promote a positive experience for all. We are proud that many of our staff have supported this program since 2011 and collaborate with autism and behavior specialists in the ongoing development of this program. Their expertise and compassionate, welcoming attitudes are the hallmark of our program.

**Q: *Can I bring items or foods that I know will help my child manage their experience better?***

**A:** Yes, you should feel welcome to bring headphones or earplugs if your child uses these. You may also bring your own snacks and drinks. We encourage you to bring the individual motivational systems and schedules that you would normally use. You may download materials from the website prior to the performance and bring paper copies of those materials to theater to make activity books and schedules. Electronic materials will also be available to download onto an iPad, most tablets, and smartphones (as long as the device has the ability to display pictures and/or video).

**Q: *I'm unsure if my child will be able to sit through the entire show. If not, can we go in and out of the theater during the show (or leave the show early)?***

**A:** Yes. There will be an activity area in the lobby where individuals may engage in activities related to the performance, watch the performance on a video monitor, or simply relax. **You should not be concerned that anyone's behavior will interrupt the show.** The actors have been prepared for a variety of sounds and movement. The show will go on regardless of the activity in the audience. The actors are very happy to participate in these performances.

**Q: *How can I ask for HELP?***

**A:** Look for trained staff and volunteers throughout the theater or in the activity area. On the day of the performance, you will be given information about how to request varying levels of assistance from figuring out where the bathrooms are to help implementing individual motivational systems while in your seats. They are ready, willing and able to assist you in reaching your goals. **You may ask for help again and again if needed.** Do not hesitate to reach out and tell us what you need.

**These unique presentations are designed and delivered under the advisement of the  
Paper Mill Autism Advisory Team:**

**Kelly A. Carlile, PhD., BCBA-D .....CEO/Kelly Ann Consulting, LLC**

**Jeff Jacobs, M.A., BCBA .....CEO/Community Behavior Consulting, LLC**

**Linda S. Meyer, Ed.D., BCBA-D, MPA, CPT.....CEO/Linda S. Meyer Consulting, LLC**

**Q: *How can I prepare my child for this outing to the theater?***

**A:** We post a sequenced social story for each performance on Paper Mill Playhouse's website. Click on the autism puzzle ribbon at the bottom of the home page. This booklet includes sequence photos of the grounds and theater interior, as well as production photos. There are two versions, one with written descriptions on each page and another left blank for you to write in your own descriptions to tailor the document to your child. Depending on the show, other supportive resources may also be available, such as sing-a-long prep videos, and aids that compare the play to the movie or book it may have been based on.

Additionally, on an advertised day prior to an Autism-Friendly performance, Paper Mill Playhouse will host a **FREE Open House called "Meet Your Seat"**, expressly for children to visit the theater before the show to become familiar with the space and grounds and to ease their transition. No reservations are required to attend and the box office will be open to purchase tickets.

**Q: *My child uses a wheelchair? What is the best access to the theater?***

**A:** We have a circular driveway in front of the theater for passenger unloading. There are limited accessible parking spots in our lots. We have accessible seating inside the theater in several locations.

**Q: *Are service animals welcome?***

**A:** Yes, service animals are always welcome at Paper Mill Playhouse.

**Q: *Will there be more Autism-Friendly performance like this?***

**A:** Yes, when an appropriate show with kid appeal is scheduled as one of our 2-3 hour featured main stage productions, like *Disney's The Little Mermaid* or *Elf*, we will attempt to schedule an Autism-Friendly performance if our operating schedule permits. It may not always be possible; however, we also include some Autism-Friendly performances as part of our weekend morning Children's Theater series. These one-hour shows are always designated by the colorful autism puzzle ribbon. Through these Saturday or Sunday morning performances, Paper Mill Playhouse is committed to providing ongoing Autism-Friendly offerings at affordable prices.

**Q: *Does Paper Mill Playhouse offer any other access services for patrons with disabilities?***

**A:** Yes, Paper Mill Playhouse is a national leader in providing access services for patrons with disabilities. In addition to having a barrier free facility, for each featured main stage production we schedule performances that are American Sign-Language interpreted and open-captioned for the hearing impaired. Patrons with vision loss attend audio-described performance that are preceded by sensory seminars where they may touch and feel costumes and props from the show, hear the actor's voices and receive a guided tour of the set on stage. We also provide show programs that are in large-print or Braille. Information about our access services may be found on our website, [PaperMill.org/Accessibility](http://PaperMill.org/Accessibility), or by calling our box office at (973) 376-4343.

**Q: *I have a question not addressed here. Who may I speak with at Paper Mill Playhouse to get more information on the Autism-Friendly services and accommodations?***

**A:** You may contact the Director of Education, Lisa Cooney at (973) 315-1667, or by email at [LCooney@PaperMill.org](mailto:LCooney@PaperMill.org).



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