

Frequently Asked Questions



What does it mean to be an Autism Friendly Business?

Businesses want to make the effort to understand, welcome and include individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and their caregivers. CARD-USF trains their staff for awareness about ASD and specific strategies to help people with ASD be comfortable and successful during their visits. Visual supports may be created if needed. Employment or internship opportunities for individuals with ASD are encouraged but not required. If requested, CARD-USF may provide brief “Lunch and Learn” trainings on informative topics for business’s employees who have a family member on the autism spectrum.

Does this mean a business is certified by the State of Florida, CARD-USF or involves a legally bound contract?

No, there is no state or local certification for the business or staff; however, as a result of consultation and education, businesses will do their best to understand the patron’s needs and make reasonable adjustments if possible.

The Autism Friendly designation is achieved when a business completes the consultation and training process with CARD-USF and is listed on the CARD-USF Community Partnership Page. To maintain Autism Friendly designation, CARD-USF offers ongoing technical assistance and training as the business requires.

Are accommodations and modifications guaranteed and expected?

Each business will determine which modifications are safe and reasonable. Safety requirements will remain the same for all guests or customers regardless of abilities.

May I drop my child off at a business alone or expect childcare services?

If your child is mature enough to independently manage their visit, communicate with staff and follow the rules and safety requirements, then it may be permitted.

However, unless the business specifically offers childcare services, Autism Friendly businesses are not responsible for directly supervising, caregiving or parenting a child. Caregivers are strongly encouraged to attend and participate with their children during their visits.

All individuals will still have to comply with the policies and rules of the business or organization. Unsafe behaviors will be addressed as policies dictate.

If your child lacks independent self-care skills (i.e. toilet use, feeding oneself, personal hygiene, etc.) your child’s participation may be limited unless you make your own arrangements to provide assistance for these needs.

May an adult, young adult or teenager with ASD bypass height or age requirements for a business? For example, accessing rides or exhibits for young children.

In general, height and age requirements are set for safety purposes. However, it is understood that some more mature individuals with ASD may have a preference for activities that are typically accessed by younger customers. A business may choose to make exceptions if safety permits and the comfort of other guests is not disturbed. In all cases, safety standards will not be compromised.

Are visual supports such as social experience stories available to view prior to the visit?

Many businesses will have a social experience story available on their website, at their customer service area, or on the CARD-USF website. However, not all are required to provide these supports.

What is a social experience story and how can it help?

It is intended to provide individuals with ASD with guidance for social behaviors, sensory comfort and reasonable expectations for their visit.

If my child has a dietary restriction, may I inquire about an accommodation?

You are welcome to contact the business to discuss. It is suggested to review any restaurant, café or food options prior to inquiring. There is no requirement for accommodating this need.

My child has difficulty with crowds, what should I do?

You may want to call the business to discuss the best day and time to attend with fewer crowds.

Is there a difference between Autism Friendly and “Sensory Friendly”?

Yes, Autism Friendly is an initiative created by CARD-USF to create a more inclusive community through consultation, training and ongoing technical assistance to our business partners. We develop visual supports for the activities of the business, discuss possible modifications to accommodate the sensory needs of customers with ASD and collaborate to provide internships or employment opportunities for people with ASD.

“Sensory Friendly” describes specific events by a business that may include sensory modifications for individuals with ASD.

Do businesses pay a fee to become Autism Friendly?

No, it is a free service through CARD-USF.