

ultra

# Kidtelligence



## SUPPORTING NEURODIVERSITY

Recently LEGO announced their Play for All accelerator grant, a \$20 million pledge to support neurodivergent kids by funding mentorship programs and organizations aimed at helping autistic kids and kids with ADHD through play-based learning.

“Neurodiversity” was coined by Judy Singer, an autistic sociologist in 1997. The term refers to the wide spectrum of human brains and how they work. “Neurodiversity” aims to reframe the way we think about everyone, particularly those with neurological differences like autism, ADHD, intellectual disabilities, etc.

Around the same time that LEGO announced their grant, Legoland in Florida unveiled that they have become a Certified Autism Center theme park – joining Sesame Place, all 26 Six Flags locations, and a handful of others.

“Offering the ASD community a theme park experience that embraces and understands their special needs is paramount to allow for growth, joy and a day away from the normal routine,” said LEGOLAND Health Services supervisor Ken Flanders. (David Brady, Senior Public Relations Manager, LEGOLAND® Florida Resort)

Accommodations include designated quiet rooms with noise-cancelling headphones, weighted blankets, squishy toys and LEGO® building tables, social stories – that offer an illustrated, step-by-step walkthrough of every ride and show, so guests won’t be surprised – and specialized training to help park staff more effectively interact with guests on the autism spectrum and their families or caregivers.

**“I’m extremely passionate about creating an environment that reaches out to all types of people, no matter the circumstances.”**

– – Nick Parham, Legoland Florida, coordinator in the resort’s education department

More brands are including depictions of a greater spectrum of neurodiversity.

In 2017 Target launched its Cat & Jack clothing line which includes a line of adaptive clothing without tags, featuring flat seams, and sensory-friendly graphic tees, all designed to minimize discomfort for those with sensory processing needs.

Increasingly museums, zoos, orchestras, hotels and other public venues are making strides with inclusive programming. Many reserve a day or special hours for those with sensory needs or disabilities to visit. Some also provide tools or resources for a more successful visit. For example, the Burlington Public library in Iowa became one of the state’s first sensory-friendly libraries. The library will work towards making all activities autism friendly and include a wider selection of books with neurodiverse characters available in the children’s section.

Children’s television has also increased the representation of neurodivergent characters, particularly girls, in recent years. She-Ra and the Princesses of Power, Sesame Street, and The Owl House feature characters on the autism spectrum and/or characters with ADHD. And, just last month the BBC commissioned a new preschool show, Pablo, about an 8-year-old boy’s journey attending school for the first time.

What brands have you seen support neurodiversity?