

QUALITY OF LIFE DESIGN GOALS

From: *Residential Environments for Adults on the Spectrum: From Research to Built Form*

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ENSURE SAFETY & SECURITY

In addition to addressing basic life safety factors and criminal threats, residential design should also enhance security and safety by selecting materials, furnishings and design features that minimize falls, slips, and imbalance, and reduce the extent of injury should such occur. Controlling access to and from the residence and surrounding outdoor space needs to skillfully minimize features that result in feelings of “imprisonment” or unnecessarily restrict resident’s choice and autonomy. Meaningful places to wander and explore under safe circumstances provide opportunities for productive exploration and exercise. Also, the design of the residence should be crafted to help anchor residents’ sense of security through attachment to familiar physical objects and spaces.



MAXIMIZE FAMILIARITY, STABILITY, PREDICTABILITY & CLARITY

Potential for environmental overload and divergent interpretations of environmental cues can be addressed by design that fosters coherence, clarity, predictability, control and restoration. Functional clarity of rooms or residential spaces with their primary or functional purpose may help diminish confusion of what is appropriate behavior or use of those spaces. The scale of space, type and style of furnishings, fixtures and features play a role in clarifying environmental “messages.”



ENHANCE SENSORY BALANCE

Designing residential spaces requires a *balance* of sensory experiences – tactile, odors, visual and auditory – when providing housing with multiple occupants. This may be effected by having multiple spaces, each with its own level of stimulating features, so residents can choose which spaces best suit them. Or an overall sensory-neutral residence can be provided in which stimulating furnishings, wall hangings, special lighting fixtures, and other features can be added to enhance the quality of the space for specific individuals.



OFFER MULTIPLE OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONTROLLING SOCIAL INTERACTION AND PRIVACY

Desired levels of privacy and sociality lies in the *control* individuals have in regulating boundaries, whether those boundaries are interpersonal or physical ones. A number of spatial treatments can provide opportunities for allowing residents to control the level of privacy or openness they desire in their homes, through visual access, visual exposure, gradients and terminals. When a residence is shared, the number of housemates depends upon a number of individual and economic circumstances, as well as the size and configuration of the residence that does, or does not, allow for ample control of access and privacy. But the number of housemates should be relatively small since homes also are regularly visited by support providers and families, adding to the number of occupants and different levels of privacy needs.



PROVIDE ADEQUATE CHOICE AND INDEPENDEN

Design options should provide the opportunity to engage in meaningful activity. When the physical environment is planned to enable residents to use capacities and skills they have, residents achieve a level of independence and a sense of accomplishment. The most effective assistive technological devices are those that help residents learn how to control the environment on their own. Design features and technologies that require a level of human effort – but not an overwhelming or frustrating level – help keep lives as mentally and physically challenging as possible.



FOSTER HEALTH & WELLNESS

The physical environment of our homes and immediate outdoor settings can enhance and promote health. Many adults with autism have health issues associated with general aging. But autism is also more highly associated with other health conditions, such as epilepsy, mental health symptoms such as OCD and anxiety, stress, sedentary living, to name a few. Poor and even toxic indoor air quality is deleterious to many residents, but particularly those with chronic health conditions. A number of “green” certification standards now incorporate design and building features that can minimize health risks associated with poor indoor environmental quality and that also enhance wellness.



ENHANCE ONE’S DIGNITY

How spaces are designed can enhance or diminish a sense of dignity of the occupants. Exterior design that blends in with neighboring residences – or incorporates features that are socially valued in the community -- suggests that residents “fit in” with neighbors. In the interior, providing a room of one’s own provides opportunities for personalization. The dignity of intimacy is too often overlooked; but having visual and auditory privacy in one’s spaces provides an appropriate and comfortable setting for intimate relationships from the rest of the home’s occupants when the residence is shared. Finally, providing slight or moderate levels of challenges engendered by one’s environment can promote a sense of accomplishment and even pleasure, allowing for opportunity of a dignity of risk.



ENSURE DURABILITY

Specifying materials and equipment that are durable and easily maintained is essential not only for the resident’s safety and well being but also for minimizing long-term maintenance costs of the home. The challenge is finding hard-wearing materials and fixtures that do not have an institutional or commercial appearance but rather reflect a residential quality. The physical environment needs to be robust, ensuring that the risk of injury to the residents, support providers and damage to the property is all kept to a minimum.



ACHIEVE AFFORDABILITY

The increasing difficulty of obtaining affordable housing is a factor of low income relative to high housing costs. Public funds for constructing and providing affordable homes are unable to keep up with the numbers needed. Building shape, appearance, layout and density – as well as that of parking and outdoor space – can be designed in such a manner to not only reduce construction and operational costs but also that produces pleasing and well-designed homes. However, efforts to trim construction costs by cutting corners in design, specifications and construction can have long-range negative impacts on residents if what is cut is essential to their health and well-being.



ENSURE ACCESSIBILITY AND SUPPORT IN THE SURROUNDING NEIGHBORHOOD

Locating the residence in close proximity to services, retail, and public transportation makes it much easier for residents to access community amenities that are necessary for living more independently. And situating the residence in communities or neighborhoods where there are strongly-held values of helping, caring, and interacting with others, is also key to feelings of social inclusion. Design factors can influence the extent to which residents find it easy or difficult to engage in neighboring or in becoming familiar with each other. Locating one’s in proximity to others on the spectrum, whereby a mutual sense of connection and support can develop, is helpful for some individuals in advancing connections with the larger community.