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# How LEGOLAND Resorts Are Making Certain They Are Autistic Inclusive

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Brooklyn, NY - April 24 2021: Visitors pass through the colorful entrance gate to Legoland in New ... [+] GETTY

As of March 31, 2023, all LEGOLAND Resorts in North America are considered a Certified Autism Center (CAC). This means that all LEGOLAND employees have received training to ensure any visitors on the autism spectrum or with other sensory disorders

have the best visit. It also ensures that specially designed spaces on site provide quiet rooms, sensory guides, and low-sensory areas.

"We worked with The International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards (IBCCES) to develop [sensory guides](#) for our Parks," Matt Besterman, Public Relations Manager at [LEGOLAND New York](#), said. "The guides are posted on each ride and on our website and mobile app. They indicate whether there are bright lights, loud sounds, or any features families might need to plan around. By rating the sensory levels of each attraction – touch, taste, sound, sight, and smell – we make it easier for families to pre-plan activities that align with the needs of their children. Our guides also feature a Park map that indicates low-traffic areas for visitors needing a low-sensory break area."

IBCCES had granted LEGOLAND Florida and LEGOLAND California autism certification in 2022. This new certification in 2023 provides all LEGOLAND Resorts, including LEGOLAND New York, with the tools and support needed to engage thoughtfully with a neurodiverse population while giving every child a chance to play their way.

"We are honored to work with all LEGOLAND Parks in North America. This is to help make sure autistic and sensory-sensitive guests and their families can make treasured memories and enjoy all the amazing experiences LEGOLAND has to offer," said Myron Pincomb, IBCCES Board Chairman. "Our programs will provide long-term support with ongoing training and other supports to the Resorts in achieving their objective of providing accessible options for all visitors."

## Autism and Inclusivity



Lilly Becker and her seven-year-old son Amadeus, photographed at the opening of the LEGO Ninjago ...

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"LEGO believes that play is for everyone, no matter where they come from, what they look like, or how they identify," said Mr. Besterman. "All of us at LEGOLAND Parks across North America and our parent company, Merlin Entertainments, feel the same way. Just like LEGO, it's our mission to inspire the builders of tomorrow and the creative minds who will shape our future. To do that, we're making dedicated efforts to offer a more inclusive theme park experience."

The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently released its update on autism's estimated prevalence](#) among the nation's children. Their research is based on active surveillance across 11 monitoring sites in the U.S. for 8-year-old children in 2020. The new report shows an increase in prevalence, with 1 in 36 children. That's up from a prevalence of 1 in 44 children in 2018 and 1 in 150 children in 2000.

"With at least 1 in 36 children in the United States affected by autism, it's so important for the autistic community to have welcoming and inclusive spaces to spend time in," said Arianna Esposito, Autism Speaks' VP, Services and Supports, Lifespan Programs. "The difference between autism acceptance and understanding is often reflected in the services and accommodations destinations offer, which can make getting around and participating in activities more enjoyable for those with developmental disabilities."

## What Do Certified Benefit Centers Have To Offer

"IBCCES has established industry-leading standards in the field of autism. They provided us with evidence-based training created with their board of clinical and subject matter experts and autistic individuals, equipping us with a deep understanding of autism and other sensory disorders," Mr. Besterman explained. "In addition, IBCCES provides resources such as onsite reviews, customized recommendations, and renewal requirements to ensure we have the tools and ongoing support to help make a lasting impact for all guests."

Some additional enhancements families can expect this year include:

- Trained front-line team members equipped better to assist autistic guests or those with other sensory sensitivities.



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Visitors attend a Meet and Greet  
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- Pre-planning resources are available for guests on the Parks' websites.
- Every ride will have a posted sensory guide (developed in partnership with The International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards) indicating whether there are bright lights, loud sounds, or any features guests might need to plan around.
- Low sensory areas allow guests with certain sensitivities to take a break and relax in a less stimulating environment.

Upon request, First Aid offers ear plugs to assist with sound and overstimulation, and "Assisted Access Passes" can be requested at Guest Services.

And the response has been very positive so far, said Besterman. "It has been overwhelming," he said. "So many parents have reached out to us expressing their joy and gratitude for taking steps to make LEGOLAND Parks even more inclusive and welcoming for their children."

As the parent of neurodiverse kids himself, Besterman knows firsthand the amount of planning that goes into any family vacation. One of the things he said he learned from the IBCCES training was that parents of kids on the autism spectrum need to be "super planners" and may need to adjust those plans on the fly as their kids' needs shift and change in a day. Helping those families means, first of all, being empathetic to those challenges and willing to listen and learn. It means a lot to Mr. Besterman personally to be part of a team committed to building unforgettable memories for every child, whatever their needs or challenges.

"It's great to see family destinations like LEGOLAND take steps to make fun opportunities available to everyone," Esposito said. "We

implore more companies to learn how they can recognize the diverse needs of people with autism and their families through Autism Speaks [Autism Friendly Designation](#) program.

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I am the Founder and CEO of Wonder Woman Writer, LLC, a freelance writer, stand-up comic, and proud mompreneur to two boys, one with special...

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