

A Guide to Setting Up Your Own Sensory Room

So you've decided to build a new sensory room and want to know where to start? This guide aims to help you design your sensory room and make the most of this exciting new area whilst avoiding the pitfalls.

Location

The first thing to consider when designing a sensory room is its location. Ideally the room needs to be located away from busy thoroughfares where external noise could be an issue.

Size and Shape of Room

All rooms are different in size and shape, and a sensory room can be developed in almost any location however circular rooms can cause problems when attempting to mount products on walls.

Lighting

Try to avoid fluorescent light fixtures. Although they have improved, the noise they produce can be unbearable to some of the populations that your sensory room may serve. Instead, opt for softer spot lights that can be dimmed via a switch. House or ceiling lights in the room should be controlled by a dimmer switch on the wall, or preferably via remote control.

Sound Insulation

This helps keep unwanted distractions (noise) from entering or leaving the room. Sound insulation can be achieved in various ways:

- Increasing the thickness of a wall
- Using different materials
- Lining walls, internally or externally, with sound dampening materials

Ventilation, Heating and Cooling

We highly recommend an air conditioning unit, as the room is more likely to require cooling due to the electrical lighting products. However, it will be necessary to have a thermostat specifically for this room, as it will require a different setting than surrounding rooms. In the absence of air conditioning, a venting system that allows for an adequate flow of fresh air is highly recommended.

Similarly, adequate heat should be available and controllable for this room. A properly heated, cooled, and ventilated room help the user and caregiver focus on the experience and task at hand, and not on the environmental concerns. Additionally, you have the added advantage of changing the temperature of the room to suit your sensory themes, i.e. if you had an 'Antarctic' or 'Desert' theme then you can adjust the room temperature accordingly.

Color of Walls, Ceiling and Floor

Wall color is personal preference. Where color Recognition work is required; it is common to project different colored lights onto walls. We recommend a wall color of off-white or ivory so the color projected is the true color visible on the wall. Otherwise, when a color is projected onto a non-white colored wall, it will produce a different, inaccurate color.

For dark studios where ultraviolet lighting effects are to be used, we recommend dark colors such as midnight blue or dark green. These dark colors are better for creating a more focused area in which to use fluorescent effects. We prefer these colors to simply black, as they provide the same effect, but can be less intimidating to those individuals who are new to a dark-room environment.

Alternatively - and not dark-room related - why have all the walls the same color? Perhaps have different colors for different areas when creating themes, or for different types of work or effect. You can also use curtains to create a room within a room

Hoisting

Where ceiling hoists provision is required, the monorail style is preferred against the 'H' frame configuration as it allows more flexibility for ceiling fittings such as curtains, lighting effects, hangings, etc. The 'H' frame however, provides greater maneuverability within the room.

If you do not require hoist access to the whole room then a monorail system may be fitted to access key areas. If the roof structure cannot support a ceiling hoist, portable hoists can be used instead.

Electrical

If necessary, existing electrical outlets can be used as is. It is preferable, however, to run a separate switched circuit for each product, with the outlets located near each piece of equipment, and the switches located together and in an optimal place in the room. This offers complete control of the products and keeps sockets and switches away from inquisitive hands! Alternatively, you can purchase our Wireless outlet control, which provides on/off capability for up to five separate outlets at a minimal cost.

Floor Coverings

The choice of floor covering depends on what the room is being used for, who is using the room and the effect you wish to create. Where wheelchairs are to be used, a durable covering is required that minimizes friction and therefore effort required for the wheelchair to travel. A combination of carpets and vinyl floor coverings offer different visual and tactile effects while adding warmth and comfort to a room.

Windows

Windows are not essential and often end up being covered with blinds or film adding to costs. If daylight and natural ventilation is required consider an appropriate size window and suitable position – we can advise on this.

Doorways

Wheelchair and hoist access may require a wider or double door. Doors need to be wide and high enough for monorail tracking systems to run through rooms and corridors. (The door is likely to be a fire door). When working with clients and students with Visual Impairment (VI) it often helps to paint a door in a

contrasting color to the rest of the room to help a client orientate themselves within the space. Caution must be taken when padding Fire doors as

their function must not be hindered in the event of an emergency occurring. Please consult your local fire codes. Whenever possible, we will help advise you on how best to safely pad your doors.

FAQ's

Is Ultra Violet (Blacklight) safe to use and if so is there a recommended usage?

UV(A) light (Blacklight) is perfectly safe to use as long as guidelines are adhered to.

Dr. Brian Duffey, a consultant to the National Radiology Protection Board has researched the use of UV light within dark rooms. He concluded that a teacher and pupil working in a dark room for 2 hours, approx. four feet (1.2metres) away from a UV light would receive a dose of ultra violet radiation equivalent to about 48 seconds of summer sunshine. Therefore, if UV light is used appropriately in a dark room, there is no risk to eyes or skin.

A national advisory board has advised maximum exposure times as: Children 5 hours per day and Adults 1 hour.

Experience has shown that local authorities generally have differing guidelines on the use of UV Light. We would suggest you contact your Local Authority for details.

Will the smoke/fog machine affect a smoke/fire detection system?

There are different types of smoke and fire detectors, we can advise on the best option for your building. Usually, there are two main types, Optical or Heat. Optical detectors may be set off by smoke or fog machines whilst Heat detectors are not affected.