

Visit Ready: Creating a Sensory Access Guide to Positive Exposure Gallery

What is Positive Exposure?

Nonprofit

- [Positive Exposure](#) is a nonprofit founded by photographer Rick Guidotti in 1997. Its mission is to challenge stigma around disability and difference by sharing affirming portraits and stories through photography, film, education, and advocacy.

Gallery Space

- Programming:
 - The Positive Exposure Gallery (4th Floor, 83 Maiden Ln, New York, NY 10038) hosts in-person educational and cultural events for schools, families, and community groups. Recent exhibitions include ART 75: NYC's District 75 Student Art Exhibition.
- Accessibility:
 - The Positive Exposure Gallery features four wheelchair accessible elevators and bathrooms. Art includes QR codes for blind and low vision visitors.
 - Positive Exposure collects access needs through a [Google Form](#) event sign-up. However, visitors are not clearly shown **what sensory accommodations exist** or **what they can request** (e.g., quiet/low-sensory space, sensory tools, step-by-step visit preparation). In addition, many autistic adults, caregivers, and educators are not familiar with social narratives. Even when a tool like that could help, people may not know to ask for it.

Google Form:



Figure 1: Positive Exposure Logo



ART 75 Family and Community Celebration Saturday, April 25, 2026

Art 75, District 75's annual student art exhibition, is hosted in partnership with Positive Exposure. Art 75 will be on display from April 25 - May 31, 2026

This year, to celebrate 6 years of **ART 75**, students submitted artworks based on the theme "I am, I Create: Explore your identity, who you are, what your passions are and/or what you are proud of." We received 167 individual submissions from across District 75. 55 2D pieces of art, 8 sculptures and 11 animations were selected by a committee to be showcased on the walls of Positive Exposure Gallery. All additional artworks will be displayed on a digital screen to celebrate all students.

We invite you to celebrate with us during the ART 75 Family Opening and Celebration!

Family and Community Celebration is April 25, 2026 from 11 am - 2 pm

Program:

- 11: am - 11:30 am Open Gallery for Families, viewing student artwork, artmaking
- 11:30 am 12 pm Student Remarks and Welcome
- 12 pm 12:30 pm Open Gallery for Families, viewing student artwork, artmaking
- 12:30 pm - 1 pm Student Remarks and Welcome
- 1 pm - 2 pm Open Gallery for Families, viewing student artwork, artmaking

evonklemp@gmail.com [Switch account](#)



Not shared

* Indicates required question

Name *

Your answer _____

Your email *

Your answer _____

Select the time slot you wish to attend *

11 am - 12:30 pm

12:30 pm - 2 pm

Child/Students Name you are coming to celebrate *

Your answer _____

Please select the school you are affiliated with. *

If you are not affiliated with a school please select: Guest of ART 75, Friend of

Positive Exposure, Community Organization or Friend of D75

Choose ▾

Do you have any access requirements you would like us to be aware of? (examples: interpretation, elevator, ramp, large print, person who uses a wheelchair, sensory sensitivities to loud noise, etc.) *

Your answer _____

Please tell us how many people you are registering to attend the event. *

Your answer _____

Please list their names. This will help us with event sign in. Thank you in advance! *

Your answer _____

If you selected Guest of ART 75, Friend of Positive Exposure, Community Organization or Friend of D75, please share what brought you here today?

Your answer _____

If you selected Guest of ART 75, Friend of Positive Exposure, Community Organization or Friend of D75, please share what brought you here today?

Your answer _____

THANK YOU for registering for the ART 75 Family and Community Celebration. We can't wait to see you Saturday, April 25, 2026!

Submit

Clear form

Figure 2: Google Doc sign up sheet for ART 75 Family and Community Celebration Saturday

The Problem:

Access Barriers for Neurodivergent Patrons at Positive Exposure

- Despite accessibility measures, Positive Exposure Gallery does not provide adequate information for neurodivergent patrons. This makes it difficult for patrons with sensory overload and their caretakers/supports to prepare for their visit.
- Many galleries unintentionally create high-sensory environments: bright overhead lighting, echoing rooms, crowds, and unpredictable noise. Some exhibitions also include intense visual or audio elements that increase sensory stress. Without clear accommodations and staff preparedness, these factors can escalate into panic or a sensory meltdown. This makes the space effectively inaccessible for some visitors.

The Solution:

Visit Ready: A Sensory Access Guide to Positive Exposure Gallery

- A resource kit designed to help neurodivergent patrons experiencing sensory overload plan ahead, reduce uncertainty, and access accommodations more easily including:
 - Social Narrative
 - Sensory Map
 - Sensory Kit including stim toys, noise cancelling headphones, and tinted glasses
 - Card for staff with information re how to accommodate neurodivergent patrons experiencing sensory overload

Who This Supports:

Neurodivergent Visitors who Experience Sensory Overload

- Neurodivergent patrons (and their families/caregivers) who may experience sensory overload, especially visitors with autism, ADHD, anxiety, or panic disorder.

What is Neurodivergence?

- An umbrella term describing people whose brains function, learn, and process information differently from what is considered typical

What is Sensory Overload?

- Sensory overload happens when one or more senses (sound, light, touch, smell, etc.) take in more input than the brain can comfortably process. It can trigger intense discomfort, anxiety, panic, or a fight-or-flight response. This sometimes results in shutdowns or meltdowns.

Timeline and deliverables:

- 1. Developed a Project Brief and Research Memo identifying target users, key barriers, and the lived experience of sensory overload in cultural spaces
- 2. Visited Positive Exposure Gallery to assess space, interview staff, and take pictures for Social Narrative
- 3. Studied museum Social Narratives. Synthesized information to create Social Narrative
- 4. Collaborated with group members to complete Visit Ready

My role: I created the **Social Narrative** (also called a Social Story) for a visit to Positive Exposure.

What is Social Narrative?

Background

- Social Narratives were developed by autism advocate and educator **Carol Gray (1990)**. A social narrative is a short, structured story that describes a specific experience in a supportive, concrete, and predictable way. Cultural institutions have adapted them to help neurodivergent visitors understand what will happen during a visit outside of clinical settings.
- Social Narratives have been adopted by such as [The Guggenheim](#), The Smithsonian's [National Zoo](#), [The Science Museum of Virginia](#), and [The Metropolitan Museum of Art](#). In addition, [The Museum Arts Culture Access Consortium](#) provides an outline for creating Social Narratives.

Common features in museum social narratives

- **First-person language** (“I will...”, “We will...”)
- **Plain, direct sentences** describing each step of the experience
- **Photos of the exterior/interior**, entrances, staff, and key spaces
- **Clear expectations** (noise levels, rules, transitions, security)

Why they're effective

- Research suggests social narratives can support behavior change and participation for autistic individuals across multiple contexts (e.g., coping, following directions, self-regulation). Beyond behavior, their biggest accessibility benefit in a museum context is that they **reduce uncertainty**, which can reduce anxiety and make sensory planning possible. Autistic creator Orion Kelly also describes social stories as helpful for building predictability and lowering anxiety—an experience that aligns with why museums use them as a pre-visit tool.
 - The study “[A scoping review: Social stories supporting behavior change for individuals with Autism](#)” by Dominique H Como, Margaret Goodfellow, Delaney Hudak, Sharon A Cermak states:

“Most studies were found to be effective for various behaviors such as aggressive actions, verbal protests, identifying emotions, executive functioning, following directions, and responding in social situations. Social narratives can be used to promote skills/behaviors in individuals with ASD to enable participation, an important goal in occupational therapy practice. They are an accessible and feasible intervention that can be implemented in various settings for behaviors including activities of daily living, social skills, independence, and self-regulation.”

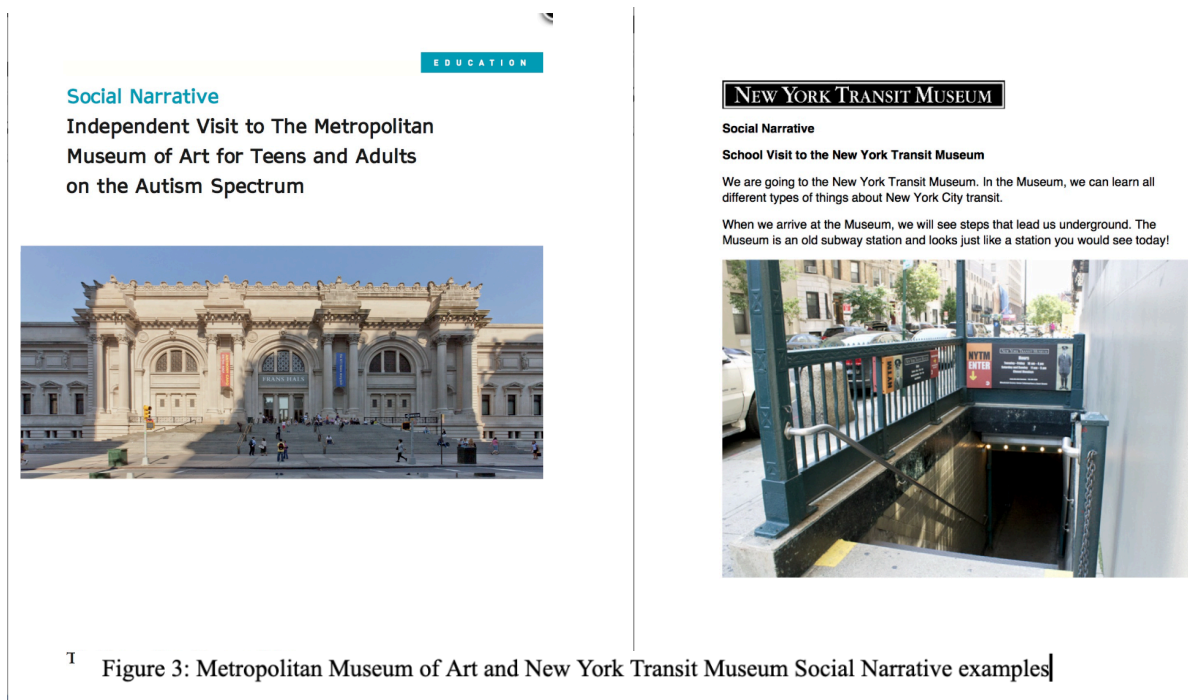
- Author and YouTuber Orion Kelly describes his own [positive experiences](#) with Social Narratives as an autistic adult, stating that:

“Social stories can reduce anxiety and build predictability, as well as reduce anxiety and build predictability.”

Social Narrative Comparative Review: Shared Structure Across Museums

In reviewing social narratives from major institutions (e.g., the Guggenheim, Smithsonian’s National Zoo, Science Museum of Virginia, The Met), I found a consistent “visitor journey” structure. Most narratives begin by showing:

1. **What the building looks like from the street** (so visitors can recognize it)



¹ Figure 3: Metropolitan Museum of Art and New York Transit Museum Social Narrative examples

2. Quiet/low sensory areas



The Museum can be a loud place.
I can always wear my headphones
or ask to go to a quiet place.



12.

If I need a break, there are benches and quiet spaces throughout the museum. I can sit on these benches or in these quiet spaces until I feel ready to continue my visit.



Photo (Top) Anna Martin, (Bottom) JenYee

Figure 4: Science Museum of Virginia and Guggenheim Social Narrative Examples

3. Who visitors may interact with (front desk, security) and what those interactions are like

This standardized structure helped me design a narrative that is familiar, predictable, and easy to scan.

When we enter, a security guard will ask to look in everyone's bags, including mine. I will open my bag so the guard can look inside. If I don't have a bag, I can walk right in.



 SMITHSONIAN'S NATIONAL ZOO
& CONSERVATION BIOLOGY INSTITUTE



I may see a **volunteer** in a red shirt. The volunteer can tell me more about the animals and may have objects for me to touch. If they tell me it's okay, I can touch the objects if I want to.

Figure 5: Metropolitan Museum and Smithsonian Social Narrative Examples

Takeaways:

- Through this comparative analysis, I identified three design patterns I chose to adopt: (1) first-person language for relatability, (2) explicit sensory warnings before potentially overwhelming spaces, and (3) photos of actual staff to humanize interactions.

Process

Step 1: Study an established model (Guggenheim)

I analyzed the Guggenheim’s social narrative structure and extracted design patterns that support sensory access. Key elements included:

- “Arriving” visuals and expectations (lines, waiting, transitions)
- Security/bag check explained in plain language
- Visitor supports (e.g., how to access fidgets, where to take breaks)
- Rules for interacting with art (quiet voice, don’t touch where relevant)
- Sensory-specific information (echoing, loud areas, sensory map)
- Clear accessibility logistics (elevators/stairs/ramps, bathrooms)
- Supportive tone and future tense (“I will...”) plus photos of real spaces

Step 2: Build the Positive Exposure Social Narrative

To tailor the narrative to Positive Exposure, our team visited the gallery and gathered details about the visitor experience. We also spoke with a staff member about:

- low-sensory space availability
- wheelchair accessibility
- how visitors move through the space
- what to expect during events

Step 3: Synthesize research + site-specific strengths

I designed the narrative to reflect Positive Exposure’s specific context, including features that can be especially supportive for neurodivergent patrons, such as:

- access to a **low-sensory room**
- **touch-friendly elements** (where appropriate)
- **image-based supports** alongside text (helpful for varied processing styles)
- **QR codes** that can support low-vision access and flexible pacing

How the Social Narrative Addresses the Access Critique

This deliverable directly responds to the core barrier (uncertainty + invisible accommodations) by:

- making the visit sequence predictable from arrival to departure
- reducing anxiety through concrete language and visuals

- explicitly pointing to sensory supports (quiet space, breaks, tools)
- helping caregivers plan and advocate more effectively
- increasing the chance that patrons will request accommodations early, rather than only after distress begins

Conclusion and Next Steps

What we delivered

By the end of the project, our team produced **Visit Ready**, a kit of sensory-access resources, including the **Social Narrative** I created.

Recommended next steps (if continuing the project)

1. **Publish the Social Narrative prominently** on the website and link it in event confirmations.
2. **Add a “Sensory Supports Available” section** with concrete examples (quiet room, sensory tools, staff support).
3. **Train staff** on recognizing sensory distress and responding in de-escalating, supportive ways.
4. **User test with neurodivergent visitors and caregivers** to refine language, length, and visual clarity.
5. Consider a **sensory map** and guidance on “what times are quieter” if data is available.

Key takeaway

Access is not only about collecting needs. It’s about **communicating supports clearly and proactively** so visitors can plan, self-advocate, and participate

Why does this matter to me?

- As a future children’s librarian interested in accessible library design, the lack of education re working with disabled patrons concerns me. Scholarly articles like [Seeking Early Literacy for All: An Investigation of Children’s Librarians and Parents of Young Children with Disabilities’ Experiences at the Public Library](#) point out the lack of disability inclusive education provided by ALA accredited MLIS programs. The study ultimately calls for a “more responsive, inclusive early literacy experiences for, and research about, young children with disabilities in public libraries today.”
- According to the ALA, the [Core Values of Librarianship](#) include:
 - Access:

Providing opportunities for everyone in the community to obtain library resources and services with minimal disruption. Library workers create systems that ensure members of their community can freely access the information they need for learning, growth, and empowerment regardless of technology, format, or delivery methods.

- Equity:

Library workers play a crucial role in fostering equity by actively working to dismantle barriers and create spaces that are accessible, welcoming, and beneficial for all. This is accomplished by recognizing and addressing systemic barriers, biases, and inequalities to create inclusive library environments where everyone can benefit from the library's offerings and services.

CONCLUSION: Understanding the needs of disabled and neurodivergent patrons uphold the core values of Access and Equity.

Social Narrative:

Visiting Positive Exposure

A social narrative for visiting the gallery

1. Introduction

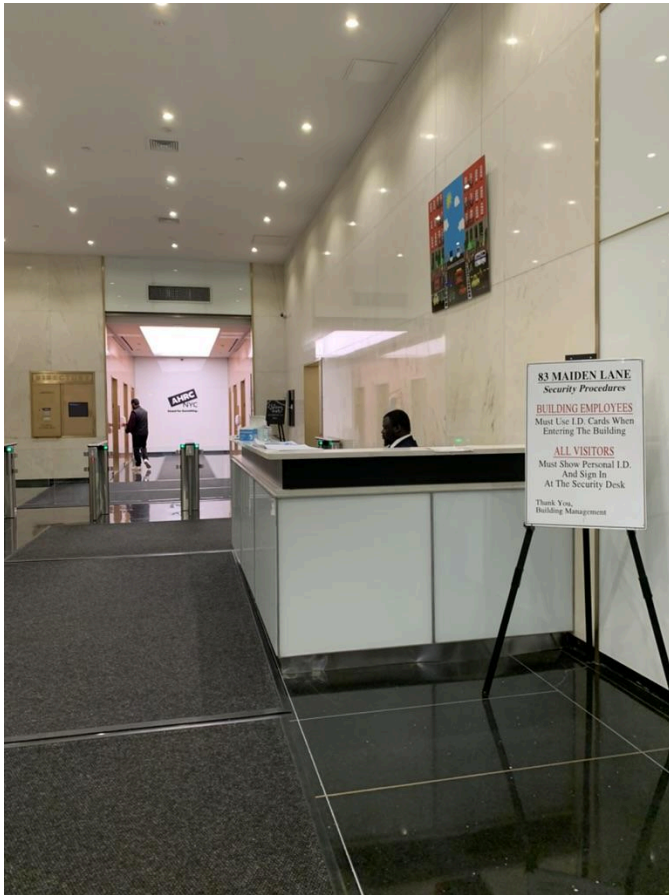
We can read this story to prepare for our visit to Positive Exposure. We will learn about how to enter the Gallery, some of the people who work at the Museum who can help us with our visit, and some of the different things that we can do at the Museum when you visit.

2. Entrance

We are going to Positive Exposure Gallery. Inside, where we will find many different kinds of art, including sculptures and paintings.

When I first arrive, I will enter through the main lobby at 83 Maiden Lane. I may notice that the entrance says AHRC NYC instead of Positive Exposure. This is because the building has multiple floors with different offices and organizations.



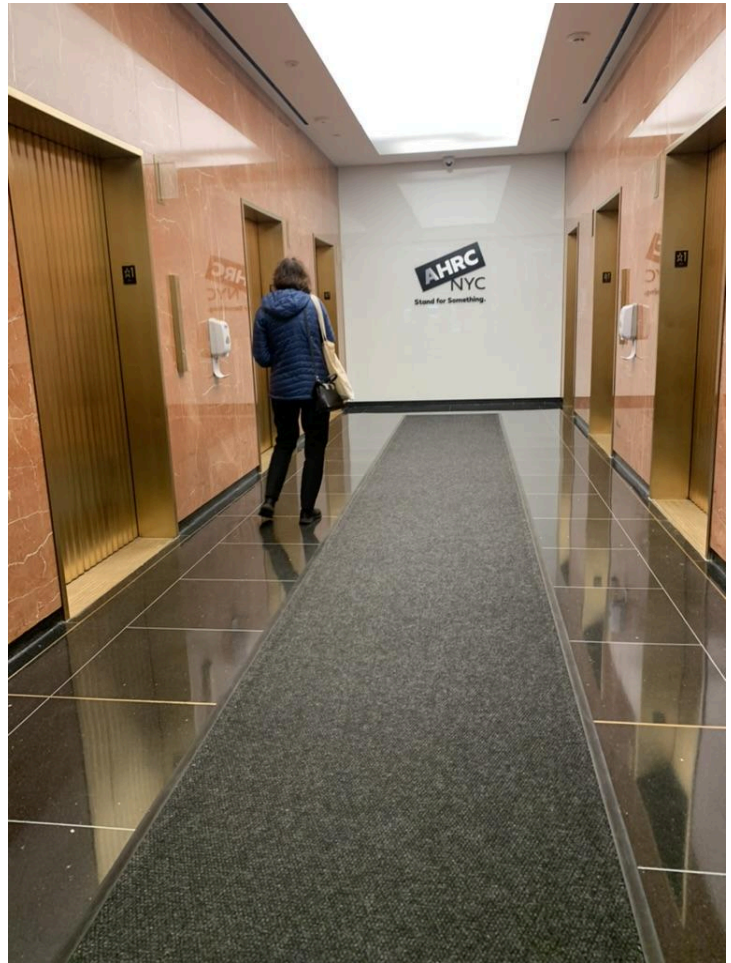


3. Check in

When we enter the lobby, we will say hello to the security guard, who will ask for our ID. The security guard is friendly and ready to help! We will then sign in by writing our name, the time we arrived, and our signature. The security guard will buzz us through the gate. If there are other guests signing in, wait patiently for your turn.

4. Elevators

Once we go through the gate, we will press the elevator button and go up to the 4th floor. Elevators are wheelchair accessible.





5. Entering the exhibit

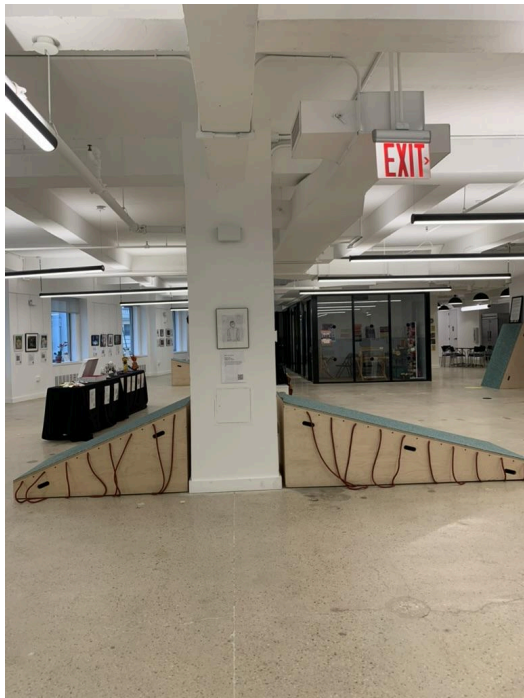
Once I reach the fourth floor, I will see a sign that says Positive Exposure Gallery. We can hang up our coats on the coat rack. We've arrived! It's time to see some art.



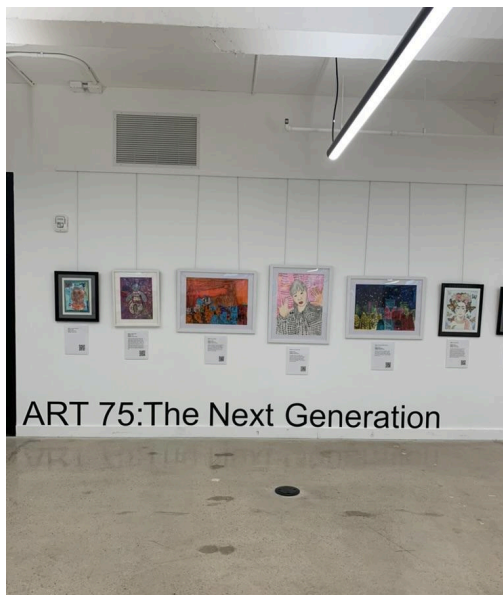
6. Interacting with the art

I will walk slowly and speak in a quiet voice. There is some art I can touch, and others I cannot. Signs will tell us what we can and can't touch.

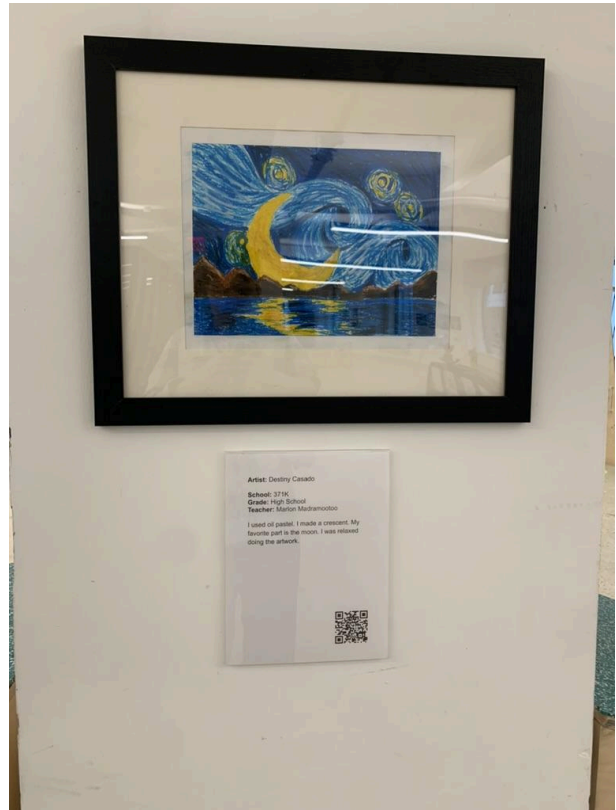
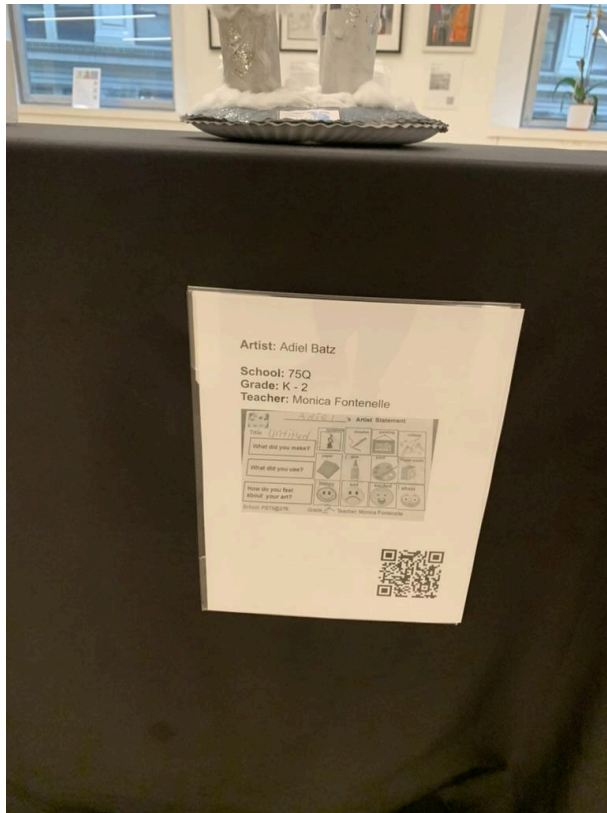
- For example, I can touch and climb on these sculptures:



- I will not touch these sculptures and paintings:



- I can learn more about the art by reading the descriptions. Some descriptions use words. Others use pictures.



7. Places to rest

If I need a break, I can sit on seats around the gallery.

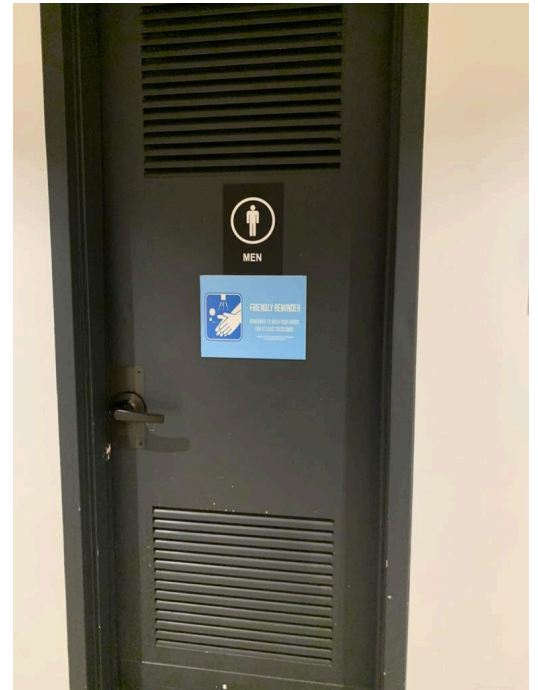


If I am feeling overwhelmed, I can visit the low sensory room. You can bring stim and sensory toys, as well as headphones.



8. Bathrooms

If I need to use the bathroom, there are three single room options. All four are wheelchair accessible. There is a men's bathroom, a women's bathroom, and a gender neutral bathroom.



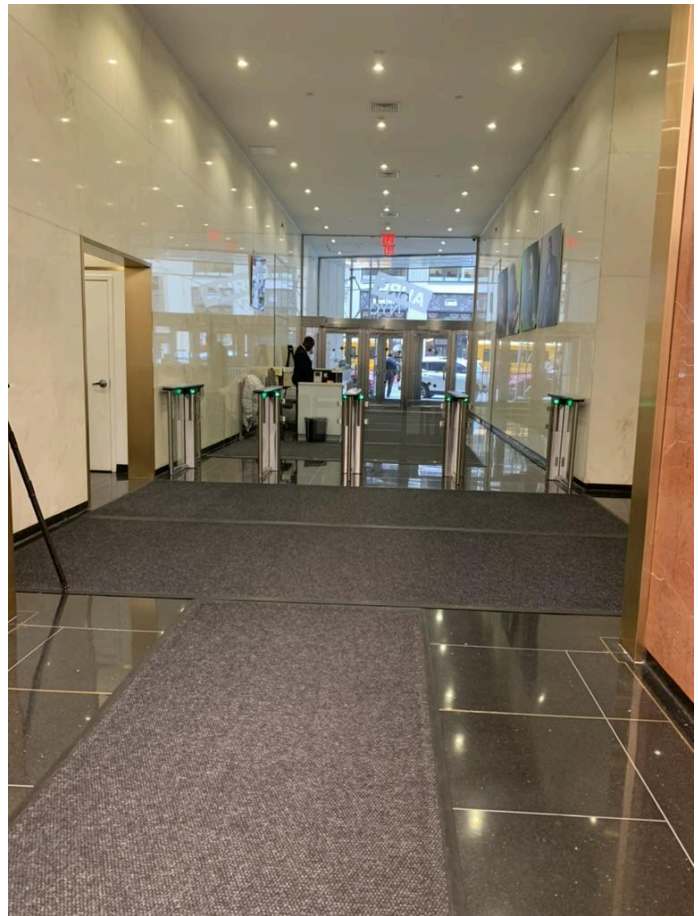
9. Water

If I am thirsty, I can use the water fountain or refill my water bottle.



10. Leaving the gallery

When I am ready to leave, I will exit through the gallery entrance. I will go down the elevator, go through the gate, walk through the lobby, and exit through the 83 Maiden Lane entrance.



More information

Everyone is welcome at Positive Exposure Gallery. To learn more visit <https://positiveexposure.org/>.

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