

## DESIGN FOR CHILDREN WITH AUTISM

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Autism is a congenital neurological disorder that develops before the age of 3 and lasts for life. The study of the US Department of Health shows that according to 2018 data, one in every 88 children in the world is born with autism. When these data are considered, there are about 550,000 people with autism in Turkey. In addition, the number of children with autism in the 0-13 age range is approximately 140.000 in Turkey. Autism affects not only individuals with autism, but also those responsible for them in their environment. When a study is done by adding this situation, it can be said that around 2 million people have to arrange their lives because of autism.

The most effective method of progression in autism therapy is intensive and continuing education. In addition, spending quality time is also an important part of this education. For this reason, play therapy is the most effective tool used for this intensive and continuing education. The game is an activity in every phase of life. As with all children, the game is very important for children with autism. Especially in the first years of their life, play is the most appropriate way of expression to recognize the world in which s/he lives and to express his/her feelings. For this reason, designing toys for children in the autistic spectrum has a very important place for communication skills, cognitive and motor skills of these individuals.

Children with autism have difficulty in interpreting different sensory stimuli. In order to control the complex world they live in, they close themselves against external stimuli and unfortunately they also limit their learning opportunities. For this reason, firstly, toys designed for children with autism must comply with these characteristics. At the same time, these toys should respond to very specific situations in terms of durability, safety and educational value. This applies to the design of pictures in their educational books. Pictures should not be too complex and detailed. In everyday education of children with autism, items in daily life are often used because sensorial toys and educational books are not designed yet for children with autism. Parents of children with autism often encounter this condition. For example, the new book can be ripped in seconds. The new toy can be turned to be a dangerous object for a child with autism. In addition, a place to go

for socializing has led to a child with autism to turn into a child who cannot be calm because of the interior design of a space. For this reason, the design of the space where the play and education environment is provided, the toys and educational books should be considered together.

The project that we propose is focusing on children aged 3-13 with autism. One of the main aim of this project is to give a hope to increase the living standards of parents and even educators of these individuals. In this project, we will focus on different basic areas such as sensory play, communication skills, cognitive and motor skills of children with autism. We will design toys and educational books just for these children as well as a space design where we aim to make all activities focused on play. In this project, we try to handle everything around the game. Our goal is not only to design toys and educational books for children with autism, but also to provide a structured game environment (architectural project) for their parents and trainers.

In this space where sensory toys and educational books will be designed and produced, therapy programs will be also planned including behavior therapists, psychiatrists, psychologists, special education teachers and play therapists. Group activities will be arranged in which children with autism can socialize with their peers. Because we believe that the most meaningful model for these children is their peers who help them to learn and to play imaginary games and participate in the game. For this reason, this project will be a socialization platform for children with autism who have difficulty in communicating with other children and are dependent on routine life.

This project has a great significance because children with autism, their parents, their educators and their peers will have sustainable training and workshops, where failures are tolerated, mistakes are accepted. In addition, these activities play an important role in bringing these individuals into society because they feel that they are valuable and they have a feeling that they have something to offer to the society.

We are expecting from our partners to give seminar series on Autism to us (designers), educators and parents of children with autism. In addition, therapy series including behavior therapists, psychiatrists and play therapists can be prepared about sensory play. We would like to organize workshop series with the partners on sensory toy design, educational books and space design for children with autism.

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A Toy Store for Children on the Autism Spectrum

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