# Shaping places for children with autism spectrum disorder

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| Our urban spaces and neighbourhoods are currently being re-imagined, creating vibrant places that increase our liveability, the opportunity to engage with the built and natural environment and allow people to live locally. The soft elements of the city including the smells, the sounds, the colours and lights all contribute to the sense of place but for some their senses significantly affect how they feel in a negative and distressing way, creating an anxiety and fear of socialising and engaging in our urban spaces (Rapp et al, 2019). Urban characteristics can cause a frightening, sensory overload for neuro divergent children, such as those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) (Davidson & Henderson, 2016). Making their experiences of our cities a very distressing which limits their ability to grow, learn and enjoy equally on a social, emotional, mental and spiritual level (Congiu et al, 2020).  Most of the research found on environment and inclusive design for neurodivergent children is primarily around buildings and private spaces. This shows a research gap regarding the transport and built environment sector and ASD.  Through engagement with families of children and young adults with autism, this think piece paper will explore the many things that could be done to make our urban centres, specifically streets and spaces, friendlier, safer, and more inclusive to children with autism. This paper will conclude that whilst there is variability across the spectrum that could make it difficult to define specific criteria, there are many elements which could be incorporated into urban spaces to improve the experiences of those with or who have a relationship with those who have ASD. Small improvements can make a significant difference to the wellbeing of families of those with ASD and also build the confidence of those with ASD in growing up into confident, healthy and psychologically supported adults. |