

# FAQ for McCarter's Relaxed Performance of *The White Snake*

## **What is a "Relaxed Performance"?**

A "Relaxed Performance" is a new term in the U.S., though it is very commonly used in the U.K. You may have heard of "Autism-friendly," or "Sensory-friendly" performances. McCarter uses the term "Relaxed Performance" because we feel it is the most inclusive of children and families with a wide range of sensory, learning, and communication differences, including, but not exclusively accessible to individuals on the Autism spectrum.

## **What type of accommodations will be made to make this a relaxed performance?**

Our technical crew will adjust certain sensory elements to be less intense for people who are sensitive to lights and sounds. For example, we will keep the "house lights" (lights in the audience, as opposed to lights on stage) on at a low level throughout the performance. We will also lower some sound levels of the music or sound effects. You should also feel free to bring headphones or earplugs if your child is very sensitive to sound.

In addition to sensory adjustments on stage, we will also offer accommodations in the lobbies such as:

- Gender neutral family bathrooms
- Ushers and theater staff specially trained by Eden Autism Services and The Arc Mercer
- Quiet area staffed by trained volunteers
- Activity area staffed by trained volunteers
- Ability to bring snacks and drinks into the theater
- Gluten free snacks available for purchase

The main goal of a relaxed performance is to create a space where people with sensory, learning, and communication differences and their families feel comfortable, supported, and free to be themselves.

## **Is this performance for children and adults with sensory, learning, and communication differences and their families only? What if my family member talks or makes noise during the performance?**

Yes, this performance is only offered to people with sensory, learning, and communication differences and their families. The tickets will not be available to the general public.

It is understood that some audience members will make noise during the show. Your family member may not be the only one who talks or makes noise during the performance. If the noise gets to be too much, you are welcome to step out of the theater for a little while so your family member can settle but this is not necessary. Use your own judgment. The actors have had training about what they can expect in terms of noise or movement in the audience, and they are excited and happy to be part of an initiative that helps children and adults with sensory, learning, and communication differences experience live theater.

## **If my family member cannot sit through the entire show, can we go in and out of the theater during the performance (or leave the show early)?**

Yes. Our volunteers and ushers will help you find your way out of the theater. We will have quiet areas in the lobby where your family member can go to regulate before returning to the theater. We will have books, fidgets, and other items available to give your family member a chance to relax. Your family member can return to the theater whenever s/he is ready.

You may leave the performance at any time for any reason. We understand that everyone has different needs, and that for some audience members, 15 minutes of a performance can be a fulfilling and meaningful experience, while others will want to enjoy the full, uninterrupted 90 minute show (there is no intermission, much like a movie).

**Will the staff at the performance be trained in assisting individuals with sensory, learning, and communication differences?**

Yes. Many of the volunteers at the show will be Eden and The Arc Mercer's trained specialists. Our staff and ushers are also participating in training so that they can provide support, too. Specialists and theater staff will be wearing name tags. Feel free to ask them for help or information at any time.

**What is *The White Snake* about?**

*The White Snake* is a 90 minute play (with no intermission) based on a classic Chinese fable. It tells the story of a snake spirit who falls in love with, and marries, a human man. However, the Buddhist monk Fa Hai opposes their "unnatural union" and does everything to keep them apart. White Snake and her trusty sidekick Greenie must battle the monk to try to keep their family together. While this tale is a love story, it does not have what most Westerns audiences would traditionally view as a happy ending.

**What can I do to familiarize my family member with the story and the experience in advance?**

There is a lot of valuable information on our website, [www.mccarter.org/thewhitesnake](http://www.mccarter.org/thewhitesnake). There you can find a more detailed synopsis and great activities for kids. You can also find *The White Snake* Social Story, which outlines the experience of attending a play and includes photos of the Matthews Theatre, lobbies, restrooms, ushers, and production photos from the show. These social stories are available as word documents so you can edit or add to them as appropriate for your family member. (Please note that the production photos are copyrighted and should not be shared or distributed in anyway).

**Are there disabled parking spots available?**

Yes. There are a limited number of parking designated accessible parking spots outside of the theater.

**Are there snacks available at the theater? Can I bring my own?**

Yes. There will be snacks available for purchase at the lobby concession stand, including several gluten free options. You are welcome to bring your own snacks and drinks as well. Snacks and drinks can be consumed in the lobbies or in the theater itself.

**Are service animals welcome?**

Yes. We want to accommodate your family member in whatever way is necessary. If you plan to bring a service animal, please make sure to tell the box office when you buy your ticket so we can make sure to take the animal into account when seating other patrons who may have sensitivities.

**Will there be more relaxed performances like this?**

Yes! We hope to include more relaxed performances in our future seasons. Several other nearby theaters have also begun integrating Autism-friendly and relaxed performances, including Paper Mill Playhouse in New Jersey. In New York City, the Theatre Development Fund (TDF) has led the charge to offer Autism-friendly performances of Broadway musicals, including *The Lion King*, *Spiderman*, and *Elf*. TDF has been a field leader in making theater accessible to children with Autism, and were a source of inspiration, support, and guidance as we designed our own relaxed performances. You can learn more about their offerings at <http://www.tdf.org/autism>.