

MemOIR of a SNAIL

neurodiverse toolkit



A guide to welcoming neurodiverse audiences
to your cinema screenings



"Life is a BEAUTIFUL tapestry that
NEEDS TO BE EXPERIENCED"

Memoir of a Snail is a new stop-motion animated film for adults, which follows Grace Pudel as she retells her life story to a snail. Covering themes of self-acceptance, connection and belonging, the film also touches on trauma, loneliness and hoarding.

The film's style and themes, coupled with its offbeat humour and warmth make it an ideal film to screen inclusively, welcoming a neurodiverse audience to your cinema to experience the film together.

Modern
Films



Statement from director Adam Elliot about his process and about some of the characters in his film:

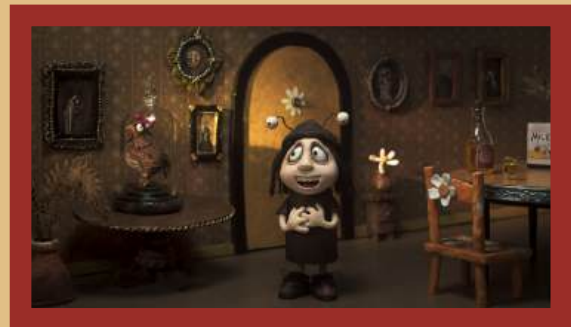
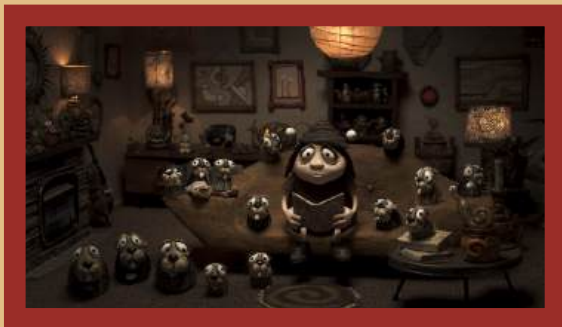
WRITING PROCESS

My screenplays are not heavily planned, and my writing process is somewhat unconventional and back to front. I start with all the varied ingredients and details I'd like in my film and then somehow find a way to string them together. I write and rewrite until some sort of structure eventually appears. I love adding quirks and idiosyncrasies to my character's psyches and try and give them incongruities and dimension; making them as empathetic, universal and real as possible. My stories are reflections of everyday life; biographies of people we can relate to; friends, eccentric relatives, and the colourful people we encounter in the street. I try to get a balance between humour and pathos, light and shade, comedy and tragedy. I invented a word to describe my films, *clayographies*, a portmanteau term combining clay and biographies. I've been lucky to turn every script I've written into a film, and when I was studying cinema at the Victorian College of the Arts in 1996, I formulated a strategy to make just nine films over my career and call them a, *Trilogy of Trilogies*; three short-shorts, (under ten mins), three long shorts, (around twenty mins), and three features, (over 90 mins). I'm fortunate to have made seven of the nine ... just two to go!



MUSES

Why do we collect unnecessary things and when does that become a problem? We all have emotional connections to the objects we collect, and the psychology behind why we decide to carry these items throughout our lives is something I'm curious of. My elderly mother was a 'semi' hoarder, and a few years ago I began the arduous task of downsizing her possessions. I began to wonder: was it a hoard or just a massive collection? Was she just a bowerbird, or did she have a problem? Was I judging her, or was I just as bad? These questions evolved into this film's narrative, which I see as both an analysis of my mum but also myself. I read many books on the psychology of hoarding, as well as documentaries and exploitative reality shows. I discovered hoarding is not rare, if anything, it is somewhat of an epidemic and the result of rampant consumerism. I learnt how extreme hoarders have often had a traumatic loss in their lives; the sudden death of a family member and, more often, a child.



As the drafts of this film evolved, I concurrently became fascinated with a friend who was also a keen 'collector' and was born with a cleft palette. She has lead a colourful life and has been a prostitute, drug addict, fantasist, public nudist, and fashion designer, (not in that order). She collects taxidermy, quirky antiques, and friends. She tells enthralling anecdotes at her famous dinner parties and is a true raconteur and unknowing eccentric. Her childhood, however, was traumatic; eleven operations on her lip had left her disfigured and mentally scarred. Teased at school, she learnt to cope and as she grew learnt how to turn lemons into lemonade. This film is infused with aspects of her life as well as my mothers ... and my own.

This guide focuses on some things cinemas can do to become more inclusive for neurodivergent audiences, using *Memoir of a Snail* as a focus screening - running Relaxed Screenings or making changes to its broader screenings and environment.

WHAT IS NEURODIVERSITY?

Neurodiversity highlights that neurological differences are a natural part of the human experience, and as a species we are neurodiverse. The term **neurodivergent** refers to how smaller groups with neurological differences from the typical can face barriers and become marginalised within larger neurodiverse settings.

This group of stars represents a **neurodiverse group**. Everyone is in this group.



The following stars in the above diagram are **neurodivergent** people whose neurotype differs from the typical within the group:



Neurodivergence is an umbrella term of different neurotypes that can include, but is not limited to, **autism, ADHD, learning disability** and **mental health conditions**. A person can self-identify as neurodivergent without a medical diagnosis. Neurodivergence is not a medical term or a list of diagnoses.

Neurodivergence is not synonymous with disability, but a person can be or identify with either or both.

Many neurodivergent people have co-occurring conditions, and can also have physical or sensory disabilities and chronic illness. For this reason, it is important for cinemas to consider access for neurodivergent people holistically.

WHAT IS A DISABILITY?

Our understanding of disability in society is influenced by ‘**models of disability**’; the most common in the UK are the **medical model** and the **social model**. These are frameworks to understand disability and we tend to use a mixture of models in practice.

While the **medical model** views disability as a person’s condition, an impairment or disorder to be overcome, the social model was developed by disabled people and their allies as a counterpoint to this.

The **social model** views disability as a result of systemic exclusion caused by physical barriers (i.e. a lack of ramps and accessible toilets) and attitudinal barriers (how society thinks, behaves and makes decisions about the barrier).

You can watch a video explaining the social model of disability from Shape Arts [here](#).

Understanding and finding ways to apply the social model of disability is a key way your organisation can become more inclusive.

REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS

The Equality Act 2010 is UK law that exists to support equity for marginalised groups including disabled people. This states that organisations are legally required to provide **reasonable adjustments** in their services and practice to support the inclusion of disabled people, and their companions.

NEURODIVERSE CINEMA AUDIENCES

All cinema audiences are neurodiverse, and it’s likely you have neurodivergent audiences already attending screenings, as well as neurodivergent staff members. Some neurodivergent people, however, face barriers to accessing the cinema and it may be something they can struggle to take part in.

Some barriers can be easy to address while others can require longer term consideration and implementation of solutions. Sometimes there can be a clash of conflicting access requirements that need careful consideration, as implementing an access measure for one group can affect access for another. The longer term solutions would include considering a fair allocation of measures to support groups of people with conflicting access requirements.

This toolkit focuses on some of the easier considerations to put in place or trial for a run of screenings, such as *Memoir of Snail*.

RELAXED SCREENINGS

One way cinemas can support neurodivergent audiences is by hosting Relaxed Screenings. Currently, the majority of Relaxed Screenings are based on the concept of “autism-friendly” screenings, aiming to consider the sensory environment of the cinema. Some cinemas run Dementia-friendly screenings, which are also a type of Relaxed Screening.

Relaxed Screenings are usually open to the general public, so anyone who would benefit from the screening’s access provisions can attend. But due to the range of access requirements people can have, and the potential for access conflicts, it is a good idea to be clear in your planning and marketing about who your screenings are primarily aimed at. This toolkit mainly draws from the concept of “autism-friendly” Relaxed Screenings.

More in-depth information about how to run different types of Relaxed Screenings can be found here:

[Dimensions autism friendly cinema training](#)
[Alzheimer’s Society Dementia Friendly Screenings guidance](#)

A standard relaxed screening often includes these features:

Lights stay on a low level during the film

This can be both due to sensory sensitivities and support people who need to move around during a screening

The volume is on a low level

Some people are sensitive to sound and can find regular cinema volume too loud

Audience members can move around or make noise during the screening

some people need to stim and tic during a film, or make involuntary noise or talk spontaneously.

A separate chill out room is available

Sometimes the experience of going to a cinema can be overwhelming, so a space away from crowds can be helpful to decompress.

The number of tickets for the screening are capped

Crowds can be difficult for some people so allow space to move around and change seats. If this isn’t possible, you could block out some extra house seats to offer to anyone who needs to move during a screening, including seats on the aisle.

No ads or trailers

Lots of ads or trailers can cause confusion due to unexpected content and additional stress in waiting for the film. If you feel you need to include trailers, advertising the actual start and end times for the film can help reduce stress.

These Relaxed Screenings, however, do not offer a one-size-fits-all solution to access. It is useful for cinemas to also consider access holistically and break down access measures to work out what can be applied across the broader cinema programme.

CONSIDERATIONS BEFORE SCREENINGS

PROGRAMMING AND PLANNING SCREENINGS FOR NEURODIVERSE AUDIENCES

If your cinema currently runs Relaxed Screenings for older or adult audiences we recommend you consider a screening of *Memoir of a Snail* in this format.

We also encourage cinemas who are currently running Relaxed Screenings only for family audiences, or have not yet run a Relaxed Screening in the venue, to consider *Memoir of a Snail* as a trial screening for older audiences.

When planning your screenings of the film, you could try:

Presenting a single screening as a Relaxed Screening

Presenting several screenings in a range of accessible screening options: Relaxed Screening, Captioned screening, regular screening.

Adapting a regular screening to make it more neurodiverse-friendly by adding some access measures.



ACCESS FORMATS FOR MEMOIR OF A SNAIL

In the UK, *Memoir of a Snail* can be booked in DCP (Digital Cinema Package) format from Modern Films.

The film is available with the following access formats:

1. Descriptive Subtitles

Many neurodivergent people find subtitles helpful to support processing information, focus, memory or to follow the story with reduced volume for sensory sensitivities.

Consider a screening, either regular or relaxed, with descriptive subtitles. For some neurodivergent people, this access measure is incredibly useful and others may struggle with them, so where possible it is advised to offer multiple screenings with and without subtitles to accommodate this.

2. Audio Description

Some neurodivergent people can find audio description useful to enhance understanding and provide context for films where this may be missed as visual content only. This is usually provided through technology in the cinema where headphones

3. Accessible technology

In addition to audio description, your cinema may have technology to support audiences with hearing loss which could include:

- **A hearing loop system.** Ensure you are thinking about holistic access and make sure your loop system is switched on and test it is working effectively.
- **Headphones** which can be used by an audience member to hear the film's audio track and can be adjusted for volume level. These headphones may also be useful for any audiences who would like to use them to adjust the volume.

If your cinema has technology to support audio description and/or volume adjustment, it's good to make sure you promote it to your audience and staff, and ensure it's working and sanitised between events.

NOISE AND MOVEMENT IN THE CINEMA

One of the most challenging things to consider about neurodivergent access can be noise and movement in cinema screenings. Some neurodivergent people need to move around or make noise during a film to regulate their emotions, reduce stress or provide comfort in situations that may be overwhelming or stressful.

This can be a difficult issue to balance in cinemas where there are conflicting access requirements or customer preferences. One of the easier ways to address this is to provide a specific relaxed screening where noise and movement is expected by audiences in advance.

It is important to note that attending a Relaxed Screening is a choice, and if someone needs to make noise or movement during any public cinema screening due to access requirements or disability they have legal protection in public spaces under the Equality Act 2010.

Here are some suggestions to support regular screenings to be more neurodiverse-friendly:

- Consider your current messaging around noise in the cinema and reconsider use of any strict policies or enforcement of rules and attitudes.
- Talk to staff about this issue and how to handle any complaints in a sensitive manner. This may need to be developed into a written protocol or policy.
- Consider trialling inclusive messaging for audiences attending screenings. For example, you can show information slides before screenings. [Here](#) are some slides you can download and use.

ACCESS SUPPORT SCHEMES

- Awareness of the [Sunflower lanyard scheme](#) where a customer wears a lanyard to indicate they have a hidden disability and may require extra support or assistance. Staff can ask any customers wearing one if they need help as part of their general customer service.
- Awareness and acceptance of ticket schemes that provide free tickets for Personal assistants, Carers or access companions, such as the [CEA card](#). Some cinemas are relaxed about needing proof for companion tickets to help remove barriers around this.



MARKETING

When marketing your screenings of Memoir of Snail, you could:

- Use your channels to advertise accessible screenings and availability of access measures using images or icons to illustrate them.
- Create a dedicated page on your website to include all the access measures you have available and the other access information for your cinema.
- Create a simple captioned walkthrough video of the venue and cinema screens. A video is a great tool to support access by increasing familiarity with the venue for new audiences.
- Consider offering some free tickets to some local groups that support neurodivergent people
- Consider trying a 'Pay As You Can' ticket option, which helps address financial inequalities that can disproportionately affect disabled people.
- Consider using simple language.
- Prepare a simple way to gather feedback about the venue and the screenings from audiences. This will help to see what works and what could be improved for future screenings and service.
- Ensure you provide clear content information about the film. Audiences can have misconceptions about some films and make assumptions, but clear information can help make sure everyone who comes to the screenings are in the intended age range and have chosen content most appropriate for them.
- Provide the running time of the film.

There is a detailed guide to inclusive marketing for Relaxed Screenings available [here](#) for more in-depth guidance.

DURING THE SCREENING, AND JUST BEFORE!

COMMUNICATION

Everyone has different communication requirements and preferences. In preparation for welcoming neurodivergent audiences it is important to support staff to:

- Take a non-judgemental approach to communication, accommodating different styles. For example some people can be direct, struggle with “small talk” or be talkative about specific interests or topics.
- Use clear language and avoid jargon.
- Be aware that not everyone uses eye contact.
- Be patient and allow time for different processing speeds.
- Be aware that people may use visual aids or communication devices instead of, or in addition to, spoken communication. Promote flexibility of communication methods.
- Be open, friendly and relaxed in customer service.

SENSORY ENVIRONMENT IN THE VENUE:

- Be aware of crowding at customer service points and entrances to the cinema, as this can be overwhelming for some customers. Try to offer quieter options or call on extra staff to reduce crowds.
- Avoid playing music or turn to a lower volume in the foyer, cinema screens and cafe areas. This helps to reduce the possibility of sensory overload.

CHILLOUT OR BREAKOUT SPACES:

- Can you offer a quiet area or a free room for audiences to use during the screening in case of overwhelm? Make sure these spaces are signposted.

SIGNAGE

- Have an informal audit of your venue to identify where additional signage would be helpful for audiences to find the screen or other important spaces, like toilets.
- Use a large sans serif font and some simple pictorial information for signage.

AFTER THE SCREENING

- Have a visible member of staff on hand to answer any questions, gather feedback and add a friendly presence.
- Staff should be available to support any evaluation methods you are using.
- It may be useful for staff to be aware of any local or national organisations for signposting any customer concerns relating to the film’s themes in relation to mental health, which could be printed out in advance. Some national organisations include:

[Hoarding UK](#)

[Hoarding Disorders UK](#)

[Mind](#) which has a wide range of mental health information, including contact details of [helplines](#).

CHECKLIST FOR CINEMA STAFF

ACTION	YES	NO
Provide a specific Relaxed Screening with adjusted sound and lighting.		
Provide a screening with Descriptive Subtitles (captioned screening).		
Publish information about the film having an audio description option available.		
Provide the running time for the film in marketing.		
Consider current general venue messaging around noise in the cinema and decide if any adjustments can be made.		
Create a protocol or policy for staff to follow when handling issues around access-related noise and movement in the cinema.		
Provide a dedicated access page on your website.		
Publicise information on assistive technology available at the cinema.		
Test any assistive technology and sanitise headphone sets.		
Provide a signposted breakout/chillout space.		
Provide some spare house seats or cap the numbers at the screening.		
Use slides before the screening to illustrate access measures and inclusivity.		
Omit ads/trailers OR publish the actual start time of the film.		
Advertise accessible screenings and availability of access measures.		
Create a captioned walkthrough video of the venue on a phone.		
Offer some free tickets to local groups which support neurodivergent people.		
Offer a Pay As You Can ticket option.		
Provide clear content information about the film (using BBFC guidance).		
Provide extra signage for the screening using a large, accessible font and pictures.		
Talk to staff about access including the subject of noise and movement in the cinema.		
Brief staff about the Sunflower lanyard scheme.		
Brief staff about the CEA card scheme and free companion tickets.		
Brief customer service staff about neurodiverse communication.		
Brief customer service staff about sensory awareness in the venue, such as crowds.		
Turn the music down or off in public areas like the foyer, cinema and cafes before and during the screening.		
Provide a simple feedback form for screenings.		
Provide staff to offer help and support after a screening.		

THANK YOU!