

# Regions Bank Branch Network Recognized as Autism Friendly

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*First-of-its-kind collaboration with the Autism Society of Alabama and the University of Alabama at Birmingham includes informational resources for branch associates and accommodations for people with autism*

BIRMINGHAM, Ala.--(BUSINESS WIRE)-- Recognizing the growing need for improved awareness about autism, Regions Bank has developed a company-wide initiative aimed at better accommodating people living with autism, as well as their family members and caregivers.

People with autism may have difficulties with language and communication, sensory overload or socialization, and activities such as visiting a bank branch may be challenging for people with autism. Regions offers accommodations at its branches designed to serve those with the neuro-developmental disability. The program includes:

- An informational video to explain autism and offer suggestions to branch associates about possible ways to respond to a customer's autism-related episode.
- Designated quiet areas in all Regions branches.
- Delivery of sensory packs to Regions' more than 1,500 full service branches. Each pack contains a stress ball, sunglasses and noise-cancelling earbuds. These items have been shown to be highly effective in helping people with autism who may have trouble in public settings because of light, noise or other environmental factors. Regions contracted with the nonprofit organization Workshops, Inc. in Birmingham, Ala., to assemble the sensory packs for distribution. Workshops, Inc. employs adults with developmental disabilities.

"Regions strives to create a friendly and welcoming environment to all people, including those with autism, and to raise awareness about the condition that affects nearly one in every 68 individuals nationwide," said Kathy Lovell, Americans with Disabilities Act Manager for Regions. "April is Autism Awareness Month, and we hope our leadership on this issue will encourage others to consider the needs of people with autism. While this month is set aside to raise awareness, our commitment to autism-friendly services is year-round. Our goal is to help people with autism, their family members and caregivers bank with independence and ease."

The idea for the program grew out of a meeting between Lovell and the Autism Society of Alabama.

"We recognized Regions' commitment to serving people with disabilities, so we shared our ideas on ways Regions can build on its commitment by providing an autism-friendly environment," said Melanie Jones, executive director of the Autism Society of Alabama. "Regions is the first and only bank that has worked with us to earn this distinction, and we appreciate the company's leadership in this initiative."

Jones connected Lovell to doctors of developmental/behavioral medicine and clinical psychology at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB), including Sarah O'Kelley, Ph.D., of the UAB Civitan Sparks Autism Clinic and Department of Psychology, and Justin Schwartz, M.D., assistant professor in the UAB Department of Pediatrics, who provided guidance for Regions branch associates to recognize the characteristics of autism.

"One of the best things associates can do to be more autism friendly is to show tolerance and understanding for those who may respond to the social and sensory aspects of the banking experience differently," said O'Kelley. "Some of the symptoms of autism may seem unusual to people without experience with this diagnosis, but being clear and direct with a person with autism and letting that person know what you're thinking can be very helpful."

Lovell continues to meet with autism support groups and service organizations within the 15-state area served by Regions to talk about the bank's autism-friendly initiative and explore ways to offer more accommodations, and in 2016 The Autism Society of Alabama recognized Regions with an Innovative Program Award for the bank's work.

"This is a building block to future opportunities," Lovell said. "I'm excited about what the future holds."

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Regions Financial Corporation

Evelyn Mitchell, 205-264-4551

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