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Information for Law Enforcement

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On a daily basis police officers encounter a multitude of individuals in emergency situations. Just as each emergency differs from the next, so does the individual involved, especially in regards to individuals with autism spectrum disorders. Police are trained to respond to a crisis situation with a certain protocol, but this protocol may not always be the best way to interact with individuals with autism. Because police are usually the first to respond to an emergency, it is critical that these officers have a working knowledge of autism, and the wide variety of behaviors individuals with autism can exhibit in emergency situations.

Teaching first responders the signs of autism is an important first step toward preventing unfortunate situations.

A person with autism might:

- Have an impaired sense of danger.
- Wander to bodies of water, traffic or other dangers.
- Be overwhelmed by police presence.
- Fear a person in uniform (ex. fire turnout gear) or exhibit curiosity and reach for objects/equipment (ex. shiny badge or handcuffs).
- React with "fight" or "flight".
- Not respond to "stop" or other commands.
- Have delayed speech and language skills.
- Not respond to his/her name or verbal commands.
- Avoid eye contact.
- Engage in repetitive behavior (ex. rocking, stimming, hand flapping, spinning).
- Have sensory perception issues.
- Have epilepsy or seizure disorder.

If a first responder is able to identify that a child or adult may have autism, he or she can then respond in a way that best supports the individual.

When interacting with a person with autism:

- Be patient and give the person space.
- Use simple and concrete sentences.
- Give plenty of time for person to process and respond.
- Be alert to signs of increased frustration and try to eliminate the source if possible as behavior may escalate.

- Avoid quick movements and loud noises.
- Do not touch the person unless absolutely necessary.
- Use information from caregiver, if available, on how to best respond.

General training guidelines*:

- Law enforcement agencies should proactively train their sworn workforce, especially trainers, patrol supervisors, and school resource officers, to recognize the behavioral symptoms and characteristics of a child or adult who has autism, and learn basic response techniques.
- A training program should be designed to allow officers to better protect and serve the public and make the best use of your valuable time, and avoid mistakes that can lead to lawsuits and negative media scrutiny, loss of confidence from the community, morale problems, and lifelong trauma for all involved.
- A good autism recognition and response workshop is designed to inform law enforcement professionals about the risks associated with autism, and offers suggestions and options about how to address those risks.

*Dennis Debbaudt, *Autism Risk & Safety Management* (<http://www.autismriskmanagement.com/>)

Resources for Law Enforcement

[National Center for Missing and Exploited Children](http://www.missingkids.com/missingkids/servlet/PublicHomeServlet?LanguageCountry=en_US)

(http://www.missingkids.com/missingkids/servlet/PublicHomeServlet?LanguageCountry=en_US)

[Project Lifesaver](http://www.projectlifesaver.org/) (<http://www.projectlifesaver.org/>)

[ASET: Autism Safety Education & Training](http://aset911.com/) (<http://aset911.com/>)

[Autism Alliance for Local Emergency Responder Training](http://www.autismalert.org/) (<http://www.autismalert.org/>)

[The Autism and Law Enforcement Education Coalition](http://www.arcsouthnorfolk.org/alec-first-responder-training.html) (<http://www.arcsouthnorfolk.org/alec-first-responder-training.html>)

[Autism Risk and Safety Management](http://www.autismriskmanagement.com/) (<http://www.autismriskmanagement.com/>)

Explore more: [Family Services \(/section/family-services\)](#), [First Responders \(/site-wide/first-responders\)](#)

Most Popular

[World's largest autism genome database shines new light on many 'autisms'](#)

([http://www.autismspeaks.org/science/science-news/world%E2%80%99s-largest-autism-genome-database-shines-new-light-many-%E2%80%99autisms%E2%80%99?utm_medium=text-link&utm_content=World's largest autism genome database shines new light on many 'autisms' &utm_campaign=mostpopular](http://www.autismspeaks.org/science/science-news/world%E2%80%99s-largest-autism-genome-database-shines-new-light-many-%E2%80%99autisms%E2%80%99?utm_medium=text-link&utm_content=World's+largest+autism+genome+database+shines+new+light+on+many+'autisms'+&utm_campaign=mostpopular))



[Five Tips that Helped Improve My Child's Behavior](#)

([http://www.autismspeaks.org/blog/2015/01/05/five-tips-helped-improve-my-childs-behavior?utm_medium=text-link&utm_content=Five Tips that Helped Improve My Child's Behavior &utm_campaign=mostpopular](http://www.autismspeaks.org/blog/2015/01/05/five-tips-helped-improve-my-childs-behavior?utm_medium=text-link&utm_content=Five+Tips+that+Helped+Improve+My+Child's+Behavior+&utm_campaign=mostpopular))

