Need to Know.....

Interactions with Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

Individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DDs) might be limited in their ability to effectively communicate and interact with law enforcement. Therefore, officers should be familiar with the potential signs of I/DDs and adjust their responses accordingly.

- **Developmental disabilities (DDs)** are long-term disabilities attributable to a physical, mental, or a combination of impairments that result in functional limitations in major life activities, such as understanding and expressing language, learning, moving, self-direction, self-care, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency.

- **Intellectual disabilities (IDs)** are a subset of DDs characterized by limited or diminished intellectual functioning and difficulty with adaptive behaviors such as managing money, schedules and routines, or social interactions.

- Examples of I/DD include autism spectrum disorder, Down syndrome, and fetal alcohol spectrum disorder.

- **Severity** of I/DD can range from mild to severe. These individuals might be high-functioning, active members of the community; they can also be non-verbal and require higher levels of supports and services.

- **Common law enforcement interactions** with individuals with I/DD might include manipulation by criminals without disabilities, victimization, disruptive or suspicious behavior, domestic disturbances, wandering, and medical emergencies, including seizures.

- Utilize **de-escalation techniques** during encounters with individuals believed to have I/DD.

- Exercise **patience** when interacting with individuals with I/DD. The person with I/DD might become easily upset, engage in self-harming behaviors, or may even become aggressive. However, an officer’s calm response can assist in minimizing such behaviors.

- When available, **consult a family member or other support person** if unable to effectively communicate or interact with the person himself or herself. A support person or family member should be familiar with the individual’s disability and may be able to provide suggestions on how to more effectively communicate with the individual. Officers might also wish to request the assistance of a disability advocacy organization.

- If possible, **consider alternatives** to taking custody of the individual. However, if an arrest is necessary, make every effort to minimize the possibility of associated trauma.

- Avoid giving **Miranda or other custodial rights warnings** to suspects with I/DD without an attorney or other advocate present who can ensure the person’s rights are protected. Officers should check for understanding of the Miranda or other custodial rights warning by asking the person in custody to repeat back his or her rights using their own words.

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