



## **MODULE 7. INTELLECTUAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES**

### **Law Enforcement Interactions with People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities: Brief Role Plays for Discussion\***

#### *Directions for the learning activity:*

This learning activity uses brief role plays to provide participants the opportunity to put the skills they learned in slides 19–28 of the Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Module into practice. The co-trainers of this module should facilitate *at least* three of the role-play scenarios below, depending on the amount of time each one takes. These scenarios are intentionally designed to be brief so that key learning points can be discussed in a variety of situations in a fairly short amount of time.

#### *How to prepare:*

Prior to the module, print off the role-play scenarios or write them down on note cards (ask the co-trainer with IDD what is preferred). The co-trainer with IDD will need time to practice reading the role-play scenarios to an officer and providing their responses. This can be done one to two weeks prior to the training through an online or in-person meeting with a support person or the officer who will be assisting with this learning activity. It can also occur on the day of the training. Set aside roughly 30 minutes to an hour to practice the activity so that the co-trainers both feel comfortable working together and facilitating the activity.

#### *During the learning activity:*

The co-trainer with IDD should explain the activity and ask for volunteers to be part of each role-play scenario. The co-trainer should then read the scenario to the officer who can either sit where they are or stand up while responding. After reading the scenario and hearing from the officer about how he or she might respond, the co-trainer can talk about what approaches may or may not work and what responses could be most helpful. The co-trainer should provide further explanation about why people with IDD may respond in certain ways. All co-trainers can provide tips that refer back to communication strategies mentioned earlier in earlier slides, as well as provide learning points from each situation.

*\*This training exercise was developed in collaboration with a person with autism and his father who work with The Arc of Benton County (Benton County, Oregon) to provide training to law enforcement.*



### SCENARIO 1:

*Someone throws a brick through a window. Two men run away, pointing at a person with IDD as the person who did it. You are having difficulty believing anything the person with IDD is saying because the person won't look at you. Ask them about eye contact and why they are refusing to look at you.*

#### Co-Trainer with IDD Response to Officer:

As a person with IDD, I'm not looking at you because I have a disability and don't communicate that way. Give me some space and more time to respond when I'm trying to answer your questions. Some people with IDD, like autism, are really uncomfortable with direct eye contact with others. This is especially common among people with autism. So, people refusing to provide eye contact may not be guilty, they may simply be acting according to their typical patterns of behavior driven by their disability.

### SCENARIO 2:

*You and EMS arrive at a house following a call for service. Your lights and sirens are on when you arrive. You observe fecal material smeared on the porch of the home. You are trying to question a person with autism, who is rocking back and forth with their head between their knees. Ask about sensory accommodations.*

#### Co-Trainer with IDD Response to Officer:

The lights and sirens are too much; they're causing sensory overload. I might ask, "Can you turn off the blinking lights and the sirens too? I can't think straight with all of that going on around me." People with IDD can be easily overwhelmed by certain sounds, noises, smells, etc. in their environment. As much as possible, try to create a quiet and serene environment around persons with IDD which can also help de-escalate emotions and behavior that can be based on fear of what is happening around them. Some officers keep a kit with items for people with autism to use to regain a sense of calm. Ask the person with IDD if it would help to use such items.

### SCENARIO 3:

*You are called to a bookstore where a customer has tipped over a shelf of books. The staff are upset at the customer who is hitting himself on the knee with one of the books. You are trying to communicate with the customer, but the person is not responding, and the stimming behavior is taking all the person's focus. Accommodate the person's stimming activity.*

#### Co-Trainer with IDD Response to Officer:

Initially, I may not respond to your questions and things could get worse if I am not allowed to continue the stimming activity. Stimming is a way I can stay calm, especially under stressful



situations like talking to a police officer. When interacting with people who need to use stimming as a coping mechanism, it's important to allow the behavior to occur as a way to keep from escalating a situation. Stimming is a safe way for people with IDD, like autism, to calm themselves and should not be interfered with unless the person is harming themselves or others with the behavior.

#### **SCENARIO 4:**

*You are called to a scene where a person with IDD is holding an open multi-tool. You are afraid they will hurt themselves or someone else. They stare at you as you shout commands to drop the knife and get down on the ground. Ask them what you can do to help them follow verbal commands.*

##### Co-Trainer with IDD Response to Officer:

Shouting can increase anxiety levels in any person but especially those with disabilities. It's important to calm the situation down as soon as possible by staying calm, not raising your voice, and trying to make a genuine connection with the person to find out what is going on, including why they are holding the tool. You can explore if they'd like to try another item to hold if safety is a concern. Keep in mind the tool may represent an item that is special to them in some way or makes them feel safe.

#### **SCENARIO 5:**

*You are called because a person with IDD is waving a lightsaber near a school. The caller said the youth must be on drugs. When you approach the person to try and speak to them, they move away from you. Ask them about personal space accommodations as you attempt to examine the lightsaber.*

##### Co-Trainer with IDD Response to Officer:

Callers may make assumptions about people showing different or concerning behaviors in the community. For example, this caller assumed the person waving a lightsaber is using drugs. Remember to consider if a person may have an IDD and do not always assume the behavior is based on drug or alcohol usage. Personal space can be an especially important thing to a person with IDD. It's important to provide the person with space so they don't feel more threatened or scared than they already do. Ask permission about approaching the person and find out how close you can come by taking a few steps at a time and asking if the person feels comfortable. As you do this, attempt to make a genuine connection with the person and find out more about the lightsaber (e.g., why they are holding it, what they like about it, etc.)



## SCENARIO 6:

*You are called because someone stole a bike matching the description of the bike a person with IDD is pushing down the sidewalk. When you stop the person and start asking them questions, the person only gives short answers and seems like they are hiding something. Use open-ended questions to learn more about the situation.*

### Co-Trainer with IDD Response to Officer:

Keep in mind that people with IDD may be giving short answers because they do not have any other way to respond. It may even appear that they may be hiding something when they are not. Try not to make assumptions about a situation and get as many facts as possible and consider if the person you are questioning has an IDD and is acting a certain way due to their disability, not due to hiding criminal activity.