What Law Enforcement Need to Know About Developmental Disabilities: Tips from an Officer and His Son

May 31, 2023
2 PM – 3:30 PM ET

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Welcome

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International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP)

The IACP is a not-for-profit 501c(3) organization headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia.

Our Mission: The IACP is dedicated to advancing the policing profession through advocacy, research, outreach, and education in order to provide for safer communities worldwide.

Since 1893, the Association has been serving communities worldwide by speaking out on behalf of law enforcement and advancing leadership and professionalism in policing worldwide.
Officer Scott Bailey and Trevor Bailey

- Officer Bailey
  - Police Officer with the Aspinwall Police Department, PA
  - Father of two sons with autism
- Trevor Bailey
  - Has autism
  - Loves NASCAR, hockey, and being with his family

When you have met one person with AUTISM, you have only met one person with AUTISM
Mission Statement

• “To teach best practices to police, first responders, and the courts so they may serve those with autism and intellectual disabilities and their families with increased understanding, compassion, and the highest standards of care”

Autism Network for Public Safety Professionals LLC is designed to educate First Responders on the importance of understanding autism and intellectual disabilities.

• Knowledge and recognizing the signs of Autism

• How to be proactive in the community.

• Educating Police, EMS, Fire Departments, EMA’s, schools and higher learning institutions and hospitals.

• Educating persons with ASD on emergencies and interaction with Law Enforcement Officers.

• Program that offers (2) EMS con-ed credits for Paramedics and EMT’s

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ASPERGER'S CAN HAVE SIMILAR CHARACTERISTICS AS AUTISM. SOME DIFFERENCES ARE THAT A PERSON WITH ASPERGER’S MAY WANT TO FIT IN, BUT THEY DON’T KNOW HOW TO. THEY ALSO MAY SEEM TO LACK EMPATHY AND CAN BE CLUMSY. CHILDREN WITH ASPERGER'S MAY HAVE A LARGER VOCABULARY COMPARED TO A CHILD WITH AUTISM.
Autism: A Hidden Disability
Characteristics of Autism May Include:

- May not always be visible
- Expected to last a lifetime
- May be cognitive (mental), physical (body), or a combination of both
- Occurs in any ethnic, racial, religious, economic, or political background
- Reflects the person’s need for services which are lifelong or an extended duration and are individually planned and coordinated
- Results in serious limitations in three or more of the following areas of major life activities:
  - Self-care
  - Communication
  - Learning
  - Mobility
  - Self-direction
  - Living independently
  - Working independently

**ASD** IS MORE PREVALENT IN **MALES** THAN **FEMALES**
Characteristics Continued:

- May not understand seriousness of a situation
- Difficulty recalling facts in detail
- May not admit to having a disability
- Low frustration tolerance
- Overwhelmed by police presence
- May not understand consequences of actions
- Acts impulsively

Characteristics Continued:

- Echolalia: mimics responses or answers
- Limited vocabulary with speech defect
- Difficulty understanding and answering questions
- Easily influenced by others
- Anxious to please others (friend zone)
- Limitations with basic communication: reading, writing, time frame, following directions/tasks, coping, and problem solving
- Says what they think others want to hear
- May be overly willing to confess (even to a crime they did not commit)
As of 2023, the number is 1 in 36 births.
Why Should This Affect Me?
Why Is This Important To Know?

• **1 in 7** persons with ASD are more likely to have an encounter with law enforcement

• **1 in 50** are school-age children; these numbers will increase

More Signs

• Stimming; pacing back and forth
• Involuntary movements with arms and legs
• Hand flapping
• Twitching of the eyes, head
• Subtle noises
• Repeating utterances
• PERSON WILL HAVE A ROUTINE!
Some Signs to Look for:

- Person not making eye contact
- Isolation
- Non-verbal
- Reaching for shiny objects
- Person may not respond to verbal commands
- May not feel pain with apparent injury
- May not be dressed appropriately for the weather
- Person may have an ID card or medical alert tag with explanation

State Statistics

- Identifying individuals with autism who are receiving services in PA
- The 2009 Pennsylvania Autism Census Project identified nearly 20,000 Pennsylvanians with autism receiving services
- In the 2014 Pennsylvania Autism Census Update, that number has risen to over 55,000 children and adults in PA with autism receiving services
- Data has shown that between the two time points, there was a 181% overall increase in the number of individuals with autism receiving services, and a 334% increase in adults 21+, making adults the fastest growing group
Persons with ASD are not programmed to lie:

• They can be easily manipulated into thinking what they are doing is perfectly justified
• They can be easily influenced by others into thinking they have a friend, when, the person with ASD is being preyed upon and turns out to the victim
  • Like “Stockholm Syndrome”: sympathize with the abuser

Be Direct, Use Simple Phrases

• “Look at me.”
• “Was the car going fast or slow?”
• “Did you take the cell phone?”
• “Sit down.”
• “Stop that.”
Interacting or Interviewing

- Speak with a calm voice
- Interview in a comfortable surrounding
- Ask for assistance from a family member/service provider
- Use pictures, drawings, or other means of communications
- More complex case: ask for a forensic officer/psychologist
- Tell the person everything up front, let there be no surprises

First responder will have to re-think when interacting with a person who has ASD

- Give personal space
- Speak clearly and try to slow things down
- Allow for plenty of time for their response and don’t rush for answers
- Silent approach with no emergency lights (never rule out safety)
- Don’t worry about eye contact.
  - Just because the person won’t look at you, doesn’t mean they’re not listening.
Missing person:

• Recent news stories on missing children with autism
  • These are just two news stories that have very similar circumstances

Starting the Search for a Missing Person
Would you charge the parents?

WHERE TO LOOK FOR A LOST PERSON. BODIES OF WATER, RAILROAD TRACKS, BUS ROUTES.
Missing Person: Have a plan in place

• If a person goes missing, know where to get the proper resources
• Time of day/year and weather
• Have one person by the Incident Commander
• Re-interview the last known person that had contact
  • Get the habits/routines/likes/frequently visited places
• If the search continues longer or has a bigger scale, coordinate with EMA
• If dogs are involved in the search, keep in mind the person may have a fear of dogs and may continue to run if encountered
• A person with ASD may not know that they are missing
• The use of drones

Drowning is the leading cause of death among children suffering from autism, according to a new study by the University of the Sciences in Philadelphia. Researchers said that since Autistic children get overstimulated with crowds, they escape to unsafe environments.

"Among the plethora of concerns for families dealing with autism, one includes addressing water safety practices as early as possible in a child's life," Variea Gibbs, OTR/L, occupational therapy professor, said in a press release. "Although water safety is a concern for all parents, children with autism are especially at a higher risk for drowning because they may seek isolation by fleeing to unfamiliar territories."

According to the National Autism Association, accidental drowning was responsible for approximately 91 percent of the total deaths in the U.S. reported in children with autism aged 14 years and younger due to wandering/desertion from 2008 to 2011. Plus, nearly 50 percent of autistic children escape a safe environment. The figure is four times higher than non-autistic children.

Gibbs recommends parents to enrol their children in swimming and water safety lessons as early as possible; make them aware of water safety measures and consequences of poor safety practices and to those who fail to respond to visual cues, place STOP or DO NOT ENTER signs.

The researcher also said that children should be equipped with details regarding his/her name, house address and phone number. Parents can also load these information in the form of a chain or bracelet. He also suggests families to regularly update their neighbors about their child's condition. Plus, before departing to a location, children should be made to understand about the new environment - whether it is a beach, pool, or a restaurant.

Gibbs said that swimming and aquatic therapy plays a beneficial role in autistic children as it addresses many of their body's sensory and motor needs. By
How to interact with a person who has a developmental disability

• Be age appropriate: Treat adults as adults and with respect

• Avoid questions about time, complex things or reason for behavior

• Be patient and give plenty of time for a response

• Speak directly to the person, keep it short and simple and speak clear and slowly

• When possible, say and show it. Use other means of communication, pictures, electronics, to convey meaning
• Start off by having one person be the point of contact, whoever has the best rapport
• Allow plenty of time for the response and understand that immediately asking again resets the process time
• Sometimes asking more than one question in a row can confuse them and they are unable to process the information

“PROTECT THOSE WHO CANNOT PROTECT THEMSELVES”
Resources

- Encountering People with Autism Roll Call Video
- Home Safe Webpage
- Home Safe Library of Resources
- Considering Locative Technology Resource
- BJA Kevin and Avonte Solicitation

Contact Information

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Home Safe  
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