People with Autism: Recognition and Response

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Who is this?
Autism

Autism is a lifelong disability that affects:

- Communication
- Social Interaction
- Repetitive patterns of behavior and interests

Autism happens on a “spectrum.” This means that, although people with autism may share certain traits, their condition may affect them in different ways.
Why talk about people with Autism?

Because PWA look just like you and I. They:

- Have jobs
- Go to school
- Use public transportation or drive
- Have friends, relationships
- Live alone
- Can be of average or higher intelligence
Challenges

- People with autism are 7 times more likely to encounter the police, yet least likely to engage in criminal behavior.
- People with autism (and other developmental disabilities) can be easily taken advantage of.
- Command of language may not indicate their level of understanding.
- May not understand the consequences of their actions.
Characteristics

People with autism may do the following:

- Self-stimulating behaviors such as rocking, flapping arms/hands, twirling.
- Repetitive behaviors. Repeating a word over and over, having an obsessive attachment to an “object.”
- Have no sense of personal space.
- May “mimic” speech or repeat sounds.
Characteristics

People with autism may do the following:

• Avoid eye contact.
• Reach for “shiny objects” such as a badge, keys, belt buckle.
• Be dressed in clothing inappropriate for the season.
• Be non-verbal.
Characteristics

People with autism may do the following:

- Speak in an unusual tone of voice (volume, monotone).
- Be overly sensitive to their environment (noises, smell).
- May not recognize a first responder vehicle, badge or uniform.
- May become anxious and react by pacing, screaming, self-harming.
How will I know if a person has autism?

Autism may not be obvious just by looking at someone. Some people may:

- Wear identifying medical tag or jewelry.
- May carry a state issued ID card (as opposed to a driver’s license).
- May have identifying information sewn into clothing, shoes, or other garments (backpack).
When might you encounter a person with autism?

- A report of an “unknown person” in the area.
- A report of a person engaging in socially inappropriate behavior.
- Retail stores.
Try to “Do”

- State the obvious. “I’m a police officer.”
- Try to dispel the person’s fear. (Calm tone of voice, explaining what you’re doing.. “My name is...and I’m here to...”)
- Move the person away from outside stimulation (lights, sirens, less sounds, less people)
- Use brief, simple and literal commands.
- Give extra time to respond.
Try to “Do”

- State the rules. People with autism are all about rules and routines.
- Tell them what is next. This helps with transition.
- Ask questions that rely on a narrative response.
- Give one command at a time.
Try “Not to Do”

- Try not to interfere with self-stimulating behavior. This actually helps the person remain calm.
- Try not to insist on eye contact.
- Try not to use jargon, sarcasm or metaphors.
- Avoid touching the person, if possible.
Thank you!
For Information and Questions

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