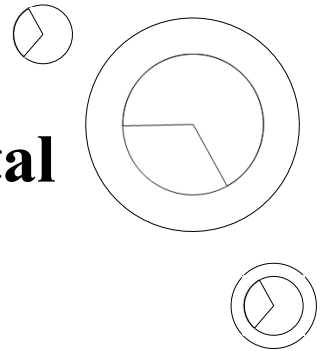


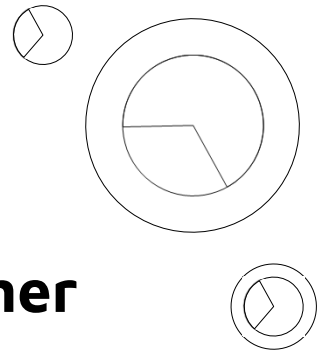
Autism - A Neurodevelopmental Disability Affecting:

- **Communication**
- **Behavior**
- **Social Interactions**

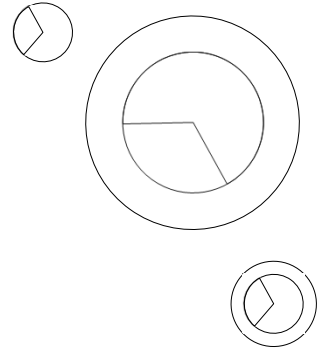


Important to Remember

Individuals w/ASD are not at higher risk of engaging in crime than the general population, however they do come into contact with police personnel at disproportionate rates

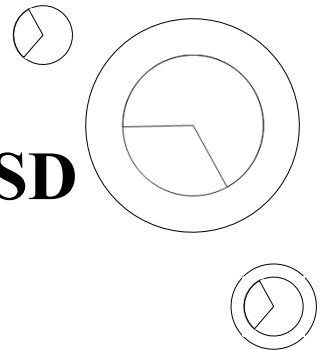


- Estimated 1 in 36 children in US have autism
- Individuals with autism 7 x more likely to encounter police than neurotypical peers
- 5 x more likely to be arrested during these encounters



Typical Reasons students with ASD may encounter police are:

- Wandering/elopement
- Behavioral outbursts in public
- Misinterpretation of behavior
- Traffic stop





Possible Outcomes

Positive outcomes when officers are trained

Without training, outcomes may include:

- Escalation due to misunderstanding
- Use of force or restraint
- Arrest or detainment
- Trauma & long-term distrust



Communication Challenges

Processing language quickly, especially under stress

Following commands quickly in expected ways

Failure to maintain eye contact

Delayed response

Interpreting nonverbal cues (e.g. tone of voice, facial expression)



Behavior Challenges

Hand waving/rocking, sudden movements etc.

Repetition of phrases

Aggressive behaviors

Self-injurious behaviors

Possible “trauma,” responses - Fight, Flight or Freeze

Overgeneralized thinking/beliefs

E.g. “All people with guns are bad

“Don’t ever go anywhere with an adult I don’t know”

Some have tendencies to, “Catastrophize.”





Preparing Individuals with Autism for Police Encounters

- Explicit instruction on police roles (books, videos, role plays)
- Explain uniforms, badges
- Practice “safe phrases” /scripted interactions & response steps
- Use social stories to explain possible interactions
- Practice staying calm and asking for help
- Consider portable self-disclosure ID tags/cards with diagnosis/contact info (Samples on National Autism Society Website)



Responses can be Perceived as the person

....

- Being hostile/noncompliant/resistant
- Having criminal intent
- Being under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- Being non-cooperative or non-compliant



Other School-Based Programs

Inviting local officers for formal presentations

Including officers in, "Meet & Greet," & other informal events

Role play interactions in safe settings

Social Narratives

A curriculum like **Be Safe**

<https://besafethemovie.com/>

Autism Speaks has a free Safety Kit available that includes tips for parents on helping to make it less likely that children elope from the home prevent students & tips for law enforcement when encountering individuals with ASD

<https://www.autismspeaks.org/tool-kit/autism-safety-kit>



Preparing Law Enforcement Officers

Autism recognition training

Communication Strategies

- Speak slowly, clearly
- Give one step directions, then time & space to process & comply
- Avoid idioms or sarcasm

De-escalation techniques

Avoid unnecessary physical contact



Additional Legal/Policy Initiatives

Project Life Saver (for wandering)

<https://projectlifesaver.org/about-us/>

- Effective 9/01/25, TX law requires that all law enforcement officers receive 2 hours training on interacting with individuals with ASD
- TX Dept. of Safety now allows autism to be identified as “communication impediment,” on state driver licenses
- Many local police departments have created a specialized behavioral health unit where police officers & behavioral health personnel respond to calls where behavioral health may be involved
- Some states have created autism registries (voluntary opt-in)