



AUTISM: TOP TIPS FOR EMERGENCY SERVICES PERSONNEL



Autism is a developmental disorder which affects the way in which an individual communicates and relates to others. Here are some top tips to show you how you can help an autistic person.

SOCIAL COMMUNICATION & INTERACTION

- Be clear and concise, say what you mean and mean what you say
- Keep conversations short and to the point, avoiding meaningless social chit chat, stick to facts
- Ask specific questions
- Offer limited-answer choices
- Avoid figurative language, idioms and metaphor are confusing
- Consider using written words, or pictures, as well
- Do not rely on facial expression, body language, eye contact or tone of voice to convey or emphasise a point



DIFFICULTY WITH CHANGE AND THE NEED FOR PREDICTABILITY

In an emergency situation, let them know:

- Who you are and why you're there
- What's expected of them
- Any rights they may have in the situation
- What's happening now and what will happen next
- Any possible impact of your encounter
- How long the process is likely to take

For non-emergency situations:

- If you've made an appointment, stick to it
- Be clear about your role
- Be clear about the purpose of the appointment
- Prepare the person in relation to any expectations
- Explain about any possible impact on them



UNUSUAL SENSORY RESPONSES

Whenever possible, aim to reduce sensory issues or explain about:

- Noise from alarms, sirens or cutting equipment
- The presence of smoke
- Water falling from a sprinkler system
- The need to be touched, guided or held
- Any necessary medical interventions

REMEMBER . . .

In an emergency situation, an autistic person may appear to be:

- Unable to understand you
- Illogical or in complete 'shut down'
- Highly anxious
- Responding in a literal way
- Cold, distant or unreactive
- Distressed or confused



If you notice these patterns of behaviour, and especially if they cluster together, you should ask the person directly, "Are you autistic?", so they can answer, "Yes" or "No".

And if you think someone is autistic, whether they've been able to tell you so, or not, you should follow your operational policies and seek a familiar, appropriate adult to support that individual.

Understanding more about autism is a vital first step towards being able to help an autistic person.

Awareness is the key!



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