Autism Risk & Safety
CAPTAIN Conference
Dennis Debbaudt 2016 Fresno

Research indicates that persons with developmental disabilities, ASD being the most prevalent, are approximately seven times more likely to interact with law enforcement than others (Curry, Posluszny & Darska, 1993). Additionally, the estimated rate of occurrence of ASD has grown dramatically: from two to five of every ten thousand Americans in the 1980s to one in sixty-eight (CDC, 2014). Law enforcement professionals advise that approximately eighty percent of patrol responses do not involve criminal activity. Law enforcement are now increasingly providing training to prepare for contact with people with ASD. Considering this, educators, ASD specialists, families and service providers must also provide students with autism at all ages with the safety and life skills to help them to increase their ability for success not only when they interact with police and public safety professionals but also to help avoid these high risk often predictable contacts altogether. Additionally, safety skills education must include strategies and advice for students about how to avoid becoming a victim or even inadvertent perpetrator of a crime.

Today's session training is designed to give you a good, practical understanding and thorough review of current trends of contact with law enforcement, tips, training options, and video tools that can help you implement or enhance instruction at your school district.

This session will also focus on persons with ASD who may become involved in the criminal justice system as offenders, victims or witnesses. Persons with ASD will have difficulty understanding the nuance of verbal and nonverbal communications and social interaction. They are perfect targets for victimization such as verbal/physical intimidation and abuse, financial exploitation, sexual abuse and manipulative efforts to engage them in criminal activity.

Less Independent Individuals

The term less independent describes persons with ASD that will have difficulty with basic life skills such as safely crossing a street, negotiating a financial transaction, and making sense of social interactions. They will be dependent on parents, siblings and other caregivers to provide the basic necessities of life: food, shelter and, especially, safety.

All children up to age seven or eight years old will need a caregiver present to manage their safety. Beyond that age, most children have become able to make good decisions regarding basic safety issues, for example: safely crossing a street, visiting a nearby friend's home to play, using public transportation or being able to tell others their name, address and phone number. Their less independent peers with ASD may very well be unable to perform these basic tasks.

Most less independent children and young adults will need a caregiver, parent, other family member or educators with them at all times. They may also be non-verbal or their verbal communications may only be understood by a family member, teacher or persons that knows them well. Those who are non-verbal may use alternative communication such as American or other Sign Language, Picture Exchange Communications Systems (PECS) or handheld and tablet computers that can speak for them.

More Independent Individuals

More independent individuals with ASD describe persons who are verbal and live semi or fully independent lives. Their IQ level is typically normal or above normal. They will typically be more able to express needs, use public transportation, learn to drive, may attend college or university and may be employed. However, they are challenged by the same issues as their less independent peers, albeit to a lesser but still significant degree (Debbaudt, 2013).

Currently, no statistics have been developed about the rate of contacts people on the autism spectrum will have with the criminal justice system. There is little evidence to suggest that persons with ASD will commit crimes at a higher rate than the general population. However, those that do may be held responsible for their actions and will typically be a more independent person with autism or Asperger Syndrome.

TIP: Determine or estimate current and projected independence level of the student. Safety strategies and plans will need to be provided to parents, families, educators, service providers or anyone who may provide direct care for less independent students. Understanding our population, people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), from the viewpoint of independence level will provide essential, student specific, information for planning safety and life skills education.

Consider Autism Icons

When traveling in vehicles, consider prominently placing disclosure tools and icons such as autism car magnets, autism alert decals, autism puzzle ribbon magnets, “I Love Someone With Autism” bumper stickers, at home on the front door and on vehicle bumpers and windows. Law enforcement and first response professionals are being trained to look for these icons and search for autism handouts based on this information. Also consider using autism awareness specialty license plates that are now becoming available in the U.S. As a precaution, always check appropriate laws regarding decal placement on vehicle windows and bumpers.

ID Options

Some type of ID wear is essential for those with autism, especially if they are non-verbal or are unable or become unable to respond to questions about their identity if they are found.

The child or adult may also wear a medical alert bracelet or tag, or carry an autism information card that a caregiver may provide. A more independent person with autism may verbally disclose their autism and also carry an information card. The less independent child or adult may also carry state-issued identification (ID), quick response (QR) barcodes, have ID information on shoe tags, sewn into garments, silk screened or imprinted on undergarments or display a non-permanent ID tattoo.

Bracelets, anklets, necklaces, shoe or jacket tags, ID cards, clothing labels or permanent ink ID on t-shirts or undergarments are all good options. The problem with some of these is they may be removed by the person with autism who has sensory issues. An innovative option is the use of prepared, washable tattoos that bear ID information (tattooswithapurpose.com). If ID wear is used, more specific language should be considered in addition to name, address and phone number, such as, non-verbal, sensitive to light, sound or touch, possible seizure activity, or may not seek help.

Autism Emergency Contact Form Model

An Autism Emergency Contact Form should be developed, copied and carried with you at all times--at home, in your car, purse or wallet. Also circulate this handout to family members, trusted neighbors, friends and co-workers. The handout will also come in handy if you are in an area other than your neighborhood and are approached by the police.

• Name of child or adult • Current photograph and physical description including height, weight, eye and hair color, any scars or other identifying marks • Names, home, cell and pager phone numbers and addresses of parents, other caregivers and emergency contact persons • Sensory, medical, or dietary issues and requirements, if any • Inclination for elopement and any atypical behaviors or characteristics that may attract attention • Favorite attractions and locations where person may be found • Likes, dislikes--approach and de-escalation techniques • Method of communication, if non-verbal sign language, picture boards, written word • ID wear jewelry, tags on clothes, printed handout card • Map and address

guide to nearby properties with water sources and dangerous locations highlighted • Blueprint or drawing of home, with bedrooms of individual highlighted

Contacting 911 Call Centers

In the U.S., emergency 911 call centers are becoming increasingly willing and able to proactively place critical response and safety information into their data base. Although not every system or agency is able to provide this service, it is certainly worthy of inquiring about. If wandering is a concern, ask your local 911 Call Center to red flag this information in their 911 computer data base. When a call comes in for response to Alzheimer's, autism, or medically fragile families who participate--911 telecommunicators can alert the first responder before they arrive with key information that you provided. When we provide law enforcement with information before an incident occurs, we can expect better responses.

Autism groups can partner with families to work with local 911 Emergency Call Centers. Single family approaches can also be made for families in more rural areas. Remember that you are volunteering this information and privacy may be a concern. This will be your choice to make.

When a wandering incident occurs, and you are listed in a 911 special needs database, please be aware that the information is typically linked to your home--to help assist during an emergency at your home.---and may not automatically transfer to identify a person who has wandered away from home and is now out in the community. Before searching, it will be your responsibility to call 911 and inform them that a family member is missing and needs assistance in the community. Be ready and willing to provide information about the person who is missing, either proactively or on-the-spot, to 911 telecommunicators or field officers. This can make a positive critical difference for the the field response.

To help ensure safety and lower risk for a child or adult with autism, educators, parents and care providers will need to become proactive, prepare an informational handout and develop a safety plan. A leading cause for concern are children and adults who run away or wander from parents and care providers. Wandering can also lead to high-risk field contacts with law enforcement or members of the general public.

Preparing for a wandering incident may seem extreme for some families. After all, your child or adult has never wandered or bolted. Yet, for many other families, addressing wandering the first time can be the worst time. These preparations will also become invaluable before, during and after a natural or manmade emergency situation. For example, when a parent or care provider has their own medical emergency and becomes quickly incapacitated.

Emergency planning checklist:

- Prepare and copy your Autism Emergency information handout (model below)
- Keep a copy on your refrigerator and near your phone
- When wandering occurs, call 911 before you go off to search
- Alert the 911 telecommunicator if you are listed in the 911 special needs directory
- If not listed, be prepared to stay on the phone with the telecommunicator to share information from your Autism Emergency Contact Form
- Plan and practice your response in the event of a wandering incident
- Plan a mock event and practice your response for escape from a fire in your home
- Practice the 911 call with a friend
- Keep written records or log of your efforts

Missing Children and Adults

Missing persons are among the most frequent ASD related public safety contacts. Similarly to patients with Alzheimer's disease and dementia, persons with ASD may wander away from care and, unable to provide their name, address or phone number, enter into dangerous, high risk situations. Less

independent adults can wander away from group homes and caregivers, but the majority of lost and wandering calls will involve children; the reporters will be their parents. They are often described as escape artists and runners who are prone to quick escapes into the community from homes, from schools or while shopping or traveling. They become adept at choosing when to escape, during the night, for example, when parents are sleeping. The escape can also occur when parents and caregivers become injured or incapacitated, ill or otherwise occupied, even briefly: using a restroom, taking a call, caring for a sibling.

The wandering problem is enhanced since runners typically do not conceptualize that they are running away. They may just be returning to a favorite or going back to look at something attractive, recently seen through the car window on a trip. After all, *they* do not feel lost, do not seek help and are very content to be where they are at.

Search and Rescue

Drowning is a leading cause of death for people with autism. Thoroughly search all nearby water sources. They may be unusually attracted to water sources and may be found in or near rivers, lakes, ponds, pools and fountains. The child or adult will all too often seek out and enter into water sources regardless of their inability to swim. Search permanent or seasonal pools, retention ponds, rivers, lakes and fountains.
They may also be dangerously attracted to vehicles and wander into traffic or attempt to enter nearby homes or dwellings. They may wander onto train tracks and elevated places such as rooftops, trees and power grid towers. Search hiding places such as alleys and dumps where they may find refuge under a mattress, between sofa cushions or inside discarded furniture and appliances.

When an autism report is made to the 911 call center, alert dispatchers to expect follow up calls from citizens who report suspicious persons near roadways, in neighborhoods, on property or attempting to enter homes or unlocked vehicles.

Wandering Prevention, Alert and Mandatory Reporting

Parents and families may take measures at home to ensure safety such as higher fences in yards, replacing glass with Lexan or plexiglas and installation of extra locks and alarms, motion and sound sensors. Without knowledge to the contrary, extra locks and the general appearance of the home could appear as evidence of parental neglect or abuse. Law enforcement will need to rule out parental neglect as a cause, but in cases involving children with ASD occurrences of this are low in frequency.
Families with individuals with autism might use systems and techniques that may appear to be neglectful or abusive. If you are unsure of the situation, always investigate with a caseworker that is familiar with the family and the individual.

Autism Emergency Contact Form Model

An Autism Emergency Contact Form should be developed, copied and carried with you at all times--at home, in your car, purse or wallet. Also circulate this handout to family members, trusted neighbors, friends and co-workers. The handout will also come in handy if you are in an area other than your neighborhood and are approached by the police.

Autism Registries

An increasing number of law enforcement, public safety and emergency call centers are now offering voluntary registration for individuals affected by ASD, especially those that are predictably at risk of escapism and wandering. For those that participate, person-specific information can be accessed quickly via mobile computer or by dispatch.

Ottawa Police Service and San Diego County Sheriff's Office are examples of registry programs currently in use in America. Here are links to further information about these programs: http://www.ottawapolice.ca/en/safety-and-crime-prevention/Autism-Registry.asp http://www.sdsheriff.net/co_tmh.html

Examples of person-specific information:

- Name of child or adult
- Current photograph and physical description including height, weight, eye and hair color, any scars or other identifying marks
- Names, home, cell and pager phone numbers and addresses of parents, other caregivers and emergency contact persons
- Doctor contact information
- Sensory, medical, or dietary issues and requirements, if any
- Inclination for wandering
- Favorite attractions and locations where person may be found
- Atypical behaviors or characteristics that may attract attention
- Favorite topics to pursue, calm and deescalate the person; topics to avoid that may cause fear, flight, anger or outbursts
- Approach and de-escalation techniques
- Method of communication, if non-verbal: sign language, picture boards, written word
- ID wear jewelry, tags on clothes, printed handout card or other ID
- Map and address guide to nearby properties with water sources and dangerous locations highlighted
- Blueprint or drawing of home, with bedrooms of individual highlighted
- Any other relevant information

(A template for an Autism Emergency Contact Form can be viewed below the references in this handout)

Tracking & Technology

Communications technology is now being used to track the movements of those who bolt and wander through the use of radio frequency (RF) transmitters worn by the wanderer and receivers used during search and rescue. Although there are costs involved, when used in combination with foot patrols, tracking animals, vehicles and aircraft, RF tracking technology can provide quicker, more accurate and effective ground, air, and water-borne responses.

Advice for Families, Care Providers & Educators When Child or Adult is Missing From Home, School or Other Campus

As reported, most autism related missing person's calls will be about children missing from the home. A recent rise in students with autism wandering from school has been reported in the U.S. A troubling trend is lack of campus planning. A contributing factor to recent fatal wandering incidents was the failure of school officials to immediately report the incident to 911 and request police assistance. Parents, care providers and educators should be well prepared and willing to provide immediate notification to 911 and able information about the person who is missing. Strongly advise families, school officials or other caregivers to call 911 immediately upon discovery of a missing child or adult who has autism.

At the IEP: make safety a part of the daily routine!

Learning to recognize that men and women in uniform are people you can go to and stay with during an emergency is a lesson we all learn. Persons who have autism can learn these lessons when we teach these safety skills at home, reinforce them at school and practice them in the community. They are learned best when they are delivered early and often, and are suited to a child or adult's age and ability levels.

Plan cross educational opportunities for students with autism and and law enforcement professionals. Provide them in a safe, non-threatening environment. These opportunities can result in improved field interactions and develop skills that will last throughout careers and lifetimes for both populations. Students with autism will learn that law enforcers in uniform are safe "go to" people in times of

emergency. This can help demystify police in uniform, and teach that inside the uniform are good people who are also neighbors and friends. Law enforcers who have had a basic training about autism can learn for themselves, for example, what communications in the field with persons who have autism will look and sound like and when to use the specialized autism-related tactics they learned during training. Most importantly, police officers will get the opportunity to meet the children and adults who have autism that live in their community. Best of all, the initial contact will be in a safe, relaxed, controlled environment, not during the oftentimes emotionally charged atmosphere of a sudden field contact.

Building skills for children and less independent adults

To establish these life skills education for children or less independent adults who have autism, form partnerships with teachers and law enforcement professionals to help develop a simple curriculum that helps expand skills that will enhance their safety in the community and build personal resilience to risk. Formally or informally, invite a variety of law enforcers to sit among, not stand in front of, the students. The session should be designed to last about ten minutes, be delivered as frequently as possible, and by as many different officers as possible. Rotation of officers reinforces the message to students that police officers can and will look and sound differently. Rotation also makes the skill easier to generalize for the student and will allow more officers to participate without generating extraordinary time constraints for one particular officer. Officers can be asked to talk in their own words about the life skill that is being taught at the time.

For example:

1. Recognize and respond as best they can to law enforcers, their uniforms, badges and vehicles
2. Stay with--not run from--safe, “go to” police or other uniformed first responders
3. Keep an appropriate distance when interacting with a law enforcer--or anyone else
4. To avoid making sudden movements, i.e. hands into pockets
5. Carry and safely produce an ID card
6. Disclose their autism, carry and/or produce an autism information card
7. Recognize inappropriate touching or sexual come-ons directed at them
8. Effectively report bullying or other incidents
9. Tell someone they need help, or use the phone to request it

Further, officers can participate in mock interviews, for example, by asking the student what their name is and if they have an ID card. With permission from all involved, consider videotaping the visits then using the videotape as a learning tool whenever possible. These life skills lessons will be learned best when they become part of our daily routine. Augment the skills by practicing them at school and at home. Ultimately, plan field tests in the community to gauge progress.

Community Partnership Options

Police and public safety professionals can increase safety and reduce liability by creating opportunities to meet people who have autism, their families, and support organizations.

Visit schools, work, recreation facilities, and homes of people with ASD. Invite families, advocates, and supporters to visit your stations and facilities to participate in events. Without compromising safety, let the child or adult try on specialized gear, try out equipment that produces lights or sounds and medical procedures, taking the pulse for example or get inside patrol and service vehicles such as fire-rescue vehicles and ambulances. The goal is to sensitize the person to emergency equipment and procedure. These interactions should be of short duration (15-30 minutes), repeated often (monthly) and be free as possible of any extraneous experiences--music, games, clowns, balloons. Both police/public safety professionals and persons with autism will learn about each other’s needs during these controlled, safe, and non-stressful interactions.

At the IEP: working with parents and families

Educators and campus security managers can enhance the parents' role in safety and risk management. Parents may be all too well aware of the risks their children on the spectrum face. For example, wandering away into potentially dangerous situations is a safety risk many parents confront on a regular basis. For parents, two of the diagnostic characteristics of autism--high tolerance for pain and the lack of fear of real danger--is a frightening and combustible combination. Combined with wandering, these and the risks described above affect families in their relationships with their neighbors, and during excursions outside of the home. Moms and dads may very well know what triggers their son or daughter's behaviors. They may also have well developed techniques designed to deal with or avoid those triggers, or they may know ways to de-escalate their child's behavior .

Identify behavioral issues and share deescalation options

Parents and school administrators should work together to discover information about specific behavioral and sensory information about the student. Then use that information to develop strategies to help all staff respond appropriately. For example, the parents may know what triggers an episode of screaming or provokes a tantrum in their children. They may also be able to describe their children's fears or dislikes as well as offer valuable background regarding what their children's favorite items and topics of discussion are. This information would be invaluable to responding school staff that need specific strategies and tactics to "lower the temperature" during a behavioral outburst. Most importantly, they may provide options before restraint to successfully de-escalate a student's behavior. Consider using the *Autism Emergency Contact Form* as an information sharing starting point.

Information sharing can be a two-way street. Specifically, well-informed educators and campus security can also provide valuable campus, home and community safety and risk management tips to parents.

Conclusion

Encourage and create opportunities where persons with autism or Asperger Syndrome can interact with law enforcers in a safe, structured, non threatening and low anxiety environment. You can then can learn from each other how to best interact. These educational opportunities will need to be discussed, planned and carried out. Autism advocacy groups should be encouraged to embrace these issues and help form partnerships with law enforcers. Mutual education and information sharing will always be the keys to successful resolution of autism related contacts and to increase safety and lower risk for persons with autism at home, on campus and in the community.

Be Proactive!

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email at ddpi@flash.net or call 772-398-9756.

References:

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Autism Risk & Safety Management

Autism Emergency Contact Form

Place Photo Here

Name of Child/Adult with Autism | Nickname (if any)

Date of Birth | Height | Weight | Eye Color | Hair Color

Medical Conditions | Scars or Identifying Marks

Address | City, State, Zip | Home Phone | Other Phone

Method of Communication, if non-verbal: sign language, picture boards, written word, etc.

Identification Worn: (ex. Jewelry/Medic Alert®, clothing tags, ID card, tracking monitor, etc.)

Current Prescriptions (include dosage):

Sensory/Medical/Dietary issues and requirements, if any:

Inclination for wandering behaviors or characteristics that may attract attention:

Favorite attractions or locations where person may be found, if missing:

Likes/Dislikes (Include approach and de-escalation techniques:

Name/Phone:

Name/Phone:

Name/Phone:

Name:

Address:

Home/Other Phone:

Other Contact Info:

Name:

Address:

Home/Other Phone: