

Tips for interviewing a
person with Autism:

The common characteristics associated with autism may include a lack of eye contact, frequent subject changes and blunt or vague responses to questions.



Remember that the individual is not intending to be rude or disrespectful.

Miranda Rights or legal warnings may be misinterpreted or unclear even if the individual says he understands.

Higher functioning individuals may be influenced or misled while being interviewed. This could lead to a false statement or invalid confession.

Ask open-ended questions so the individual has the opportunity to fully communicate his thoughts.

If time allows, ask an individual familiar with autism to assist you in the interview.

We invite you to take advantage
of the opportunities
available to you through

The Burkhart Center

for

Autism Education and Research

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FIRST Responder

*Burkhart Center
for
Autism Education and Research*



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Understand that an Individual with Autism:

- May run toward or away from an officer
- Can physically resist medical procedures
- May hide in a burning home instead of fleeing
- May be nonverbal
- Can be agitated if his routine changes
- May not understand what you are asking him to do or what your uniform means
- May not understand your words
- May be attracted by your badge, belt buckle, weapon, or other shiny objects and may try to touch these items.
- Sensory overload may occur from the lights or sirens on your car causing the individual to possibly flee.
- May rock, flap his hands, pace, talk to himself or display other repetitive behaviors. These are self-stimulatory behaviors the person may be using to relieve stress.
- May have sensory overload by certain aromas, canine partners, or the touch of another person.

Tips for first responders:

- Look for medical alert jewelry or an autism tag on the individual
- Keep a safe distance from the individual to ensure personal space is respected
- Talk calmly and softly
- Speak in direct, short phrases such as: "Stand up now." or "Get in the car."
- Allow processing time
- Repeat or rephrase your commands
- Ask for assistance on how to communicate with the individual from parents or others at the scene
- Avoid using slang, such as: "What's up your sleeve?" or "Are you pulling my leg?"
- Do not interpret the person's failure to respond to orders or questions as a lack of cooperation or a reason for increased force
- Avoid stopping repetitive behaviors unless there is risk of injury to yourself or others
- Check for injuries the person may not be aware of due to a lack of feeling pain
- Keep in mind the possibility that the person may be having a seizure

- If possible, remove objects or other events that may cause sensory overloading. (Turn off sirens and flashing lights, remove canine partners, crowds, etc.)
- Be aware that the individual may endure a panic attack or exhibit overload behaviors
- Use your discretion. If you have determined that the person is unarmed and have established geographic containment, use all available time to allow the person to de-escalate himself without your intervention.

Window Decal

Window decal and shoe tags are free . To request a window decal and shoe tag, please direct your request to the Burkhardt Center. Include a self-addressed envelope.



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Resources from:

Debbaudt, Dennis (2005). Autism and Law Enforcement: Recognition and Response Tips, Techniques and Safety. Presented at Autism Awareness Conference (online), Oct 12 to Nov. 12, 2005