

10 TIPS ON HOW TO INTERACT WITH POLICE

IF YOU HAVE AUTISM OR OTHER INTELLECTUAL/DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY

There aren't "special" rules for individuals that may have a disability when it comes to how you should interact with a police officer. We are all expected to obey the law and there are rules that everyone should follow when in the presence of police. Following these rules can help make sure both you and the officer stay safe.

1

Show your hands

You always want to let a police officer see your hands, otherwise she may be concerned that you are hiding a weapon. You may have an item in your pocket that helps you feel calm – like a fidget – but NEVER put your hands in your pocket when you are approached by an officer. Explain that you are feeling stressed, and your calming item is in your pocket and ask if you may reach into your pocket to get it.

2

Stay in place

Running away might make a police officer think you have done something wrong, even if you haven't. Just stay where you are and allow the officer to come and talk to you, or to continue doing his job.

3

Never touch a police officer

If you try to touch any part of a police officer's uniform, the officer may think you are grabbing for their gun, badge, or that you are attempting to hurt them. If the police think you are trying to hurt them, they may put you in handcuffs to keep themselves safe.

4

No hugging

If you really love police, offer a handshake. If you really, really want to hug an officer, ALWAYS ask first.

5

Don't stand so close

Sometimes it may be hard to judge how far apart you are standing from another person, but you can get into trouble if you stand too close to an officer. The officer may mistakenly think that you want to fight them or worry you want to grab something from their belt. If you aren't sure if your distance is ok, then ask.



6

Never touch a police officer's dog

Police officers' dogs, also known as K9s, are actual police and are working when they are in uniform. They are police officers too, so just like all other officers, you may not touch them.

7

It's ok to ask someone if they are law enforcement

Different types of police officers have different color uniforms – some are light blue shirts and dark blue pants, some are all dark blue, some are all black, some are brown, and some police don't wear a uniform at all – just regular clothes. With so many different looks it can be confusing. If you aren't sure, it's always ok to ask someone if they are police. All police carry a badge AND have a police identification card that has their picture, like a driver's license.

8

Plan and practice disclosing your diagnosis

You may have difficulty looking at someone's face during a conversation, may not respond quickly to instructions, or you may not be able to tolerate the lights and sirens from the police cars. If a police officer understands these difficulties you may have, they will understand the accommodations you may need. You could tell the officer about your diagnosis, show an officer a medical alert bracelet or a disability disclosure card. If you have a disclosure card, ask the officer if you can reach to get it. If you try to pull it out of your wallet without telling them, the officer may think you are trying to get a weapon to hurt them, so ask for permission to get something.

9

It's ok to say you don't understand or don't know

It's understandable to want to please someone. We might be tempted to answer a police officer's question even if we don't understand what we're being asked. Or we might provide information that isn't correct, just so we can feel like we've responded. But we're not helping if we aren't offering good information. Or worse, the police may mistake our attempts at being helpful as outright lying to cover up something. And that can get us into trouble. Police would prefer that if we don't understand what they are asking, or if we truly don't know an answer, that we tell them.

10

Police are moms, dads, and other regular people too

Police officers have regular lives outside of their jobs just like you have different interests and activities outside of school or your job. And, just like you, they want to have friends. So, if you see an officer out in the community, it's ok to say hello, ask them how their