

7 TIPS ON HOW CAREGIVERS SHOULD INTERACT WITH POLICE

As parents or caregivers, the idea of our loved one interacting with law enforcement during a crisis can be terrifying. As a caregiver to an individual with autism or other intellectual/developmental disability, how can you help make this a better interaction?

1

Allow the individual to be addressed

Police are being taught to address the individual with Autism or other intellectual/developmental disabilities rather than assume that a caregiver needs to speak on the person's behalf. This does not mean that the police will not still want to speak with you, just that they will also want to hear from the individual. If the individual does not use verbal communication, please let the officer know which method of communication is most effective for the person.

2

Be clear you are there to help

In a crisis, your presence could be mistaken as someone attempting to obstruct an officer's efforts. Identify your role as a caregiver and help. You may also request to be present during an interview.

3

Offer up triggers and passions

You may be the only person on a scene with the key to end someone's meltdown or crisis. The person's passion may be the redirection tool that can turn a situation around. Officers may ask what is their mental age versus their physical age? What do they love? What makes them mad? Any sensory issues? If they wander where would they go?

4

The truth is necessary

As parents we might alter the truth for different reasons; fear we'll look like bad parents, or fear we'll portray our loved one in a bad light. But police absolutely need the truth. If you call for help to find your missing child, the police need to know how long the child has been missing because the amount of time gone changes their search parameters. If your loved one has missed medication which helps him function, the police need to know that. If your loved one has carried out threats in the past, the police need to be aware of that fact. These pieces of information could change how they approach your situation.

5

Practice, practice, practice

Practice how to interact with police with your loved one. This will help prepare her should she have an encounter with law enforcement.

6

Visit your local precinct

Introduce your loved one to the officers in your local precinct so that the first interaction between them isn't a crisis. This way the officers may become familiar with your family so they will recognize your loved one's signs of frustration and escalation and have a conversation about the best techniques to help your loved one return to calm. Your loved one may also respond differently to an officer if it's someone familiar to them.

7

Register for the Local Database or Ask to Have Information Entered in Their Premise History

A premise history is a database tied to your address. Even if the law enforcement agency does not have a special program, they can enter information like "adult with Autism lives here." It gives law enforcement quick access to critical information about a registered person with disabilities or medical condition in case they get lost, wander away, or to address an incident at your home.