



VirTra - Virtual Interactive Coursework Training Academy (V-VICTA®)

SPECIAL POPULATIONS: ADULTS WITH AUTISM

VirTra



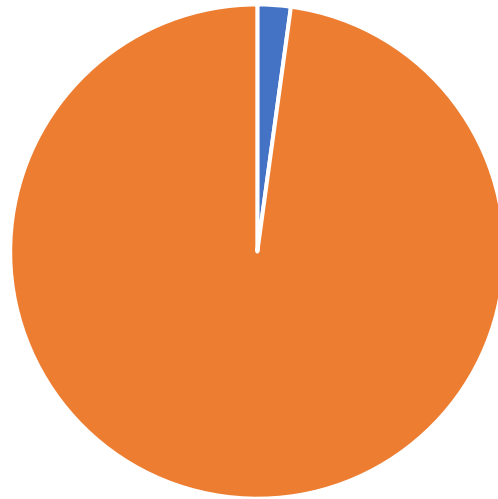
ADULTS WITH AUTISM

Introduction



RATE OF AUTISM IN CHILDREN AND ADULTS

- The CDC estimates 1 in 54 children in the U.S. have autism. **For adults, an estimated 1 in 45 have autism - which is 2.22% of the population.**
- As a first responder, you **WILL** encounter adults with autism!





ENCOUNTERING ADULTS WITH AUTISM

- Many adults with autism are able to live successful lives, working careers in demanding fields.
- Others are only able to work part time while attending day programs or other resources.
- Some people with severe autism require constant care.
- Many adults on the spectrum have positive relationships or are married, while others are unable to form meaningful relationships.





ADULTS WITH AUTISM

Interactions

INTERACTIONS



- First responders may receive calls for service from people who:
 - Try to flee
 - Be untruthful
 - May not respond to you
- While some may assume only criminals do these things, people with autism may exhibit these behaviors as well.



INTERACTIONS



- The most common reason for police interaction with a person on the spectrum was due to aggression.
- They are more likely to have a police interaction if they were older, living outside the family home, and without daytime activities or employment.



AUTISM

Behaviors



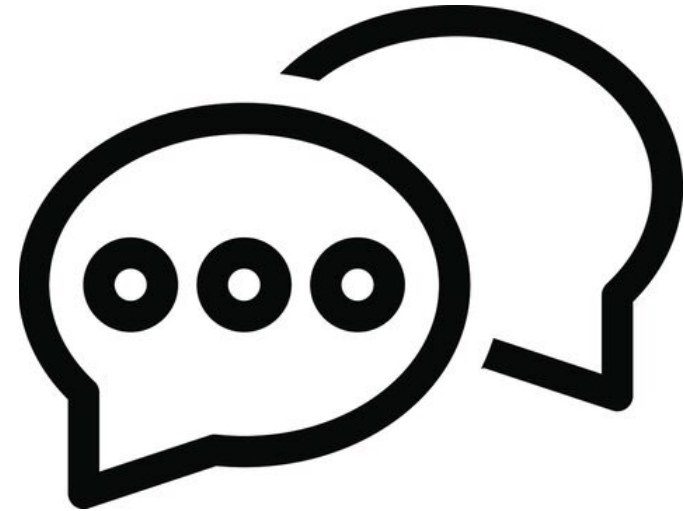
THEORY OF MIND

- Some adults with autism may have difficulty interpreting what others are feeling or thinking.
- Interactions can be frustrating for the person with autism, causing issues during questioning. This stems from an inability to interpret social cues.
- There may be difficulty maintaining a natural conversation, as the person may focus in on a particular topic.



CUES IN CONVERSATION

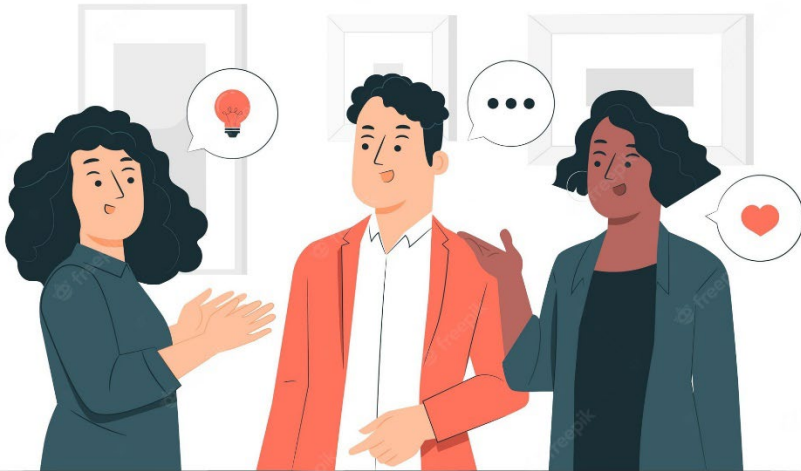
- Other cues that may occur during a conversation include:
 - Difficulty regulating emotion
 - Difficulty regulating inflection that does not reflect their true feelings
- They may respond to a simple question with a response that sounds angry or upset. It does not necessarily mean they are trying to be difficult.
- Giving the person time to respond and some space may help alleviate stress.





ROUTINE BEHAVIORS

- Individuals with autism tend to engage in repetitive or routine behaviors. Adhering to a consistent daily routine helps reduce stress.
- If their routine is interrupted, it can lead to outbursts. This is why it's important for first responders to tell them what's coming next or show them what is going to happen.



- You may encounter an adult with autism who exhibits a strong interest in something. That interest may be a distraction to the person, making a conversation or questioning difficult.
- Some strong interests may come off as socially unacceptable.
 - Some people with autism may be interested in conversations with children. This can appear suspicious, but in reality they may just relate more to children than other adults.



ADULTS WITH AUTISM

Identification



WHEN YOU ARE UNABLE TO IDENTIFY

- If the individual is unable to answer questions or provide ID, you may have to check them for something a caregiver has placed on them for identification purposes.
- Assess their comfort level before touching, as they tend to not like to be grabbed or touched.
- Check clothing for tags, a card inside a backpack, or inside a luggage tag.



ADULTS WITH AUTISM

Caretakers, Parents & Guardians



THE PRESENCE OF A CARETAKER

- A person with autism may have a parent or caretaker with them or within the general area.
- If you are attempting to interact with an autistic individual, you may want to ask them if they are with anyone.
- If a parent or caretaker is around, they may help with alternate forms of communication.
- A caretaker does NOT want to obstruct your efforts. They want to help it go as smoothly as possible for everyone.

CARETAKERS – TRIGGERS & PASSIONS



- A caretaker may be able to provide information on triggers and passions.
- A trigger is something that makes the person react in a negative way or shut down.
- A passion is an interest the person has that may get them to open up.



ADULTS WITH AUTISM

Law Enforcement Specific



ASKING QUESTIONS

- When asking questions, use as few words as possible and get straight to the point.
- Give the person time to respond – more than you would expect a person without autism to respond.
- Offer the person something to write on. Some non-verbal people are able to communicate through writing down questions and answers.



TOUCH



- If you need to touch a person, explain to them exactly what you are going to do.
- After explaining, ask them if it is OK for you to do so.
- If the person is not comfortable with you touching them, ask them if they can take anything out of their pockets and show you.

ARREST



- If arrest is necessary, remember that being touched may cause an outburst or violent response.
 - Officers must be aware this can happen, and that the intent is not to harm the officer or escape.
- Special considerations must be made for restricting movement and placement in jail or a holding cell.



RESTRICTING MOVEMENT

- Officers must weigh the need to secure the individual versus alternative methods of restricting their movements.
- Individuals with autism may have a weak understanding of cause and effect.
 - They may not understand that pulling away from an officer could lead to them being forced to the ground or pepper sprayed.
- Many individuals with autism have an underdeveloped trunk and are at higher risk of asphyxiation. Make sure to move a handcuffed person to a sitting or standing position as soon as possible.





JAIL



- If an individual with autism is brought to a holding cell or jail facility, they should be kept away from other prisoners.
- Their lack of understanding of social situations and behaviors can make them candidates for abuse.



QUESTIONS?



REFERENCES



- Autism Spectrum Disorder in the United States. Retrieved from Center for Disease Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/features/adults-living-with-autism-spectrum-disorder.html>
- Rodden, J. (2021, August 25). Autism in Adults: Spectrum Disorder Symptoms & Signs. Retrieved from Additude Mag: <https://www.additudemag.com/autism-spectrum-disorder-in-adults/>