



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

SPECIAL POPULATIONS: AUTISM

VirTra



AUTISM

Understanding Autism



WHAT IS AUTISM?

- **Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)** “refers to a range of conditions characterized by challenges with social skills, repetitive behaviors and speech and non-verbal communication as well as unique strengths and differences.”
- The word “spectrum” indicates the wide range of strengths and challenges possessed by each person with Autism.

PREVALENCE OF AUTISM



1 in 54 children are diagnosed with Autism in the United States.

Occurrence in boys is **1 in 37**.

Occurrence in girls is **1 in 151**.



BREAKING STIGMAS

- ASD affects every age group and occurs in all ethnic and socioeconomic groups.
- Roughly 44% of all children with ASD have average to above average intellectual ability.



LAW ENFORCEMENT CHALLENGES

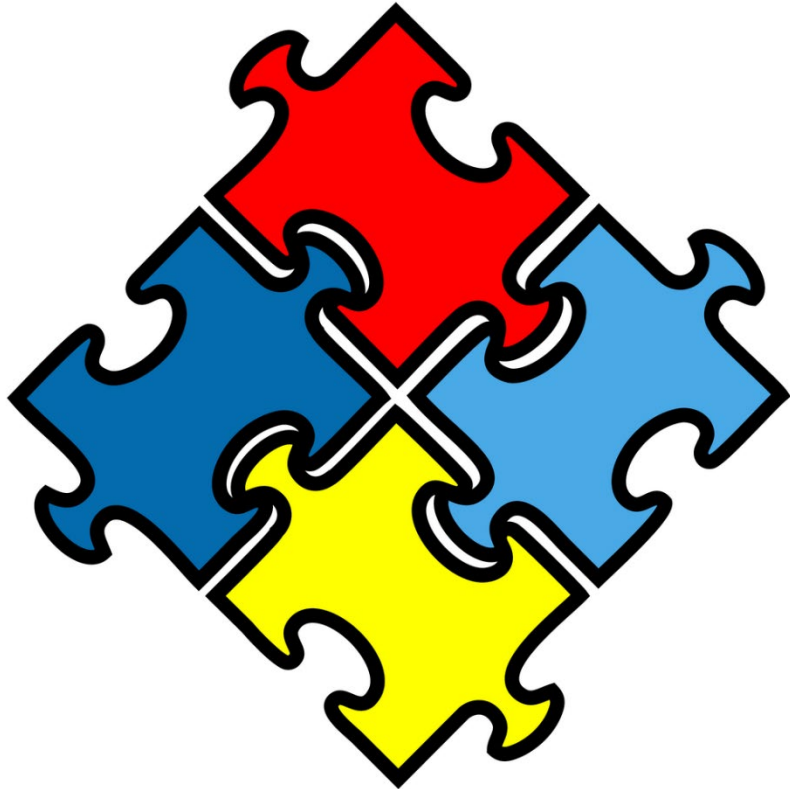


- Some behaviors associated with ASD could be interpreted as behaviors of subjects involved in some form of criminal activity.
 - Avoids eye contact
 - Prefers to be alone
 - Repetitive behaviors
 - Fleeing
 - Resistance to direction or control



AUTISM

Recognition



- It is almost impossible to tell someone has ASD just by looking at them.
- One way to visually tell is by the presence of a multi-colored puzzle piece image. This image may be displayed on a shirt, bracelet, ID card, etc.

COGNITIVE & SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS



- Many of the behaviors associated with ASD could be interpreted as suspicious behavior or behavior associated with drug use.
 - Avoids eye contact
 - Prefers to be alone
 - Repetitive behaviors
 - Fleeing
 - Resistance to direction or control
 - Gets upset with minor changes in routine or surroundings
 - Highly restricted interests



VERBAL & COMMUNICATION IMPLICATIONS

- Literal interpretations of meaning
- Tell you what you want to hear
- Echolalia (repeating what they hear)





BEHAVIORAL IMPLICATIONS

- Stimming: Self-stimulation. Often manifests as repetitive movements, speech or manipulation of objects. Examples include:
 - Hand flapping
 - Rocking
 - Echolalia
 - Manipulation of objects



BEHAVIORAL IMPLICATIONS

- Common reasons for stimming include:
 - Overstimulation
 - Under-stimulation
 - Pain reduction
 - Management of emotions
 - Self-regulation
- With the listed reasons for stimming, officers should only attempt to stop stimming if it is harmful to oneself or others.





AUTISM

Sensory Overload



SENSORY OVERLOAD

- As people with ASD process the world differently, things that may seem “normal” can become overwhelming or even painful.
- Sensory overload can lead to an adrenaline dump and all of the associated effects of adrenaline that law enforcement are used to, such as:
 - Running away
 - Hiding
 - Aggression
 - Screaming/crying
- Attempting to use reason while someone is under sensory overload is ineffective.



AUTISM

Tools



HOW TO INTERACT

- Speed – Slow it down.
- Connection – Show interest and a caring demeanor.
- Model behavior – Show them what you want or what you are going to do.
- Provide space – Give them personal space and space to retreat for yourself.
- Use environment to contain – Use the environment instead of people to contain, if at all possible.
- Avoid being forceful – They may respond with violent resistance.



INTERACTION WITH STIMMING

- If stimming is creating a problem in an investigation, there are ways to potentially reduce the behavioral expressions:
 - Decrease sensory input in the environment, such as light, noise and movement.
 - Offer a different stim that creates less of an interference.



ASSISTIVE COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES



- If verbal communication is difficult or not possible, utilize the following assistive communication techniques:
 - Picture exchange communication systems
 - Tablets
 - Sign language
 - Pen and paper



IF AN ARREST HAS TO BE MADE



- Restrain from the front.
- Remember that resistance may be extreme.
- There may be interview concerns as it is common for people with ASD to tell you what you want to hear.



WANDERING BEHAVIOR

- Roughly half of children on the spectrum elope from a safe environment.
- Nearly 2/3 of those children are unable to communicate their name, address or phone number.
- It is common for those who have wandered to end up at nearby bodies of water.
 - A recent study shows that the number one killer of children with Autism is accidental drowning.





WANDERING BEHAVIOR - ACRONYM

Approach them in a quiet, non-threatening manner.

Understand that touching a person with ASD may illicit a negative response.

Talk to the person in a slow, calm and quiet way. Provide time for them to process and respond.

Instruct the person simply and directly. Keep in mind the literal interpretations of your words.

Seek to evaluate the situation as it is unfolding.

Maintain a safe distance to keep the person calm and allow room for retreat.



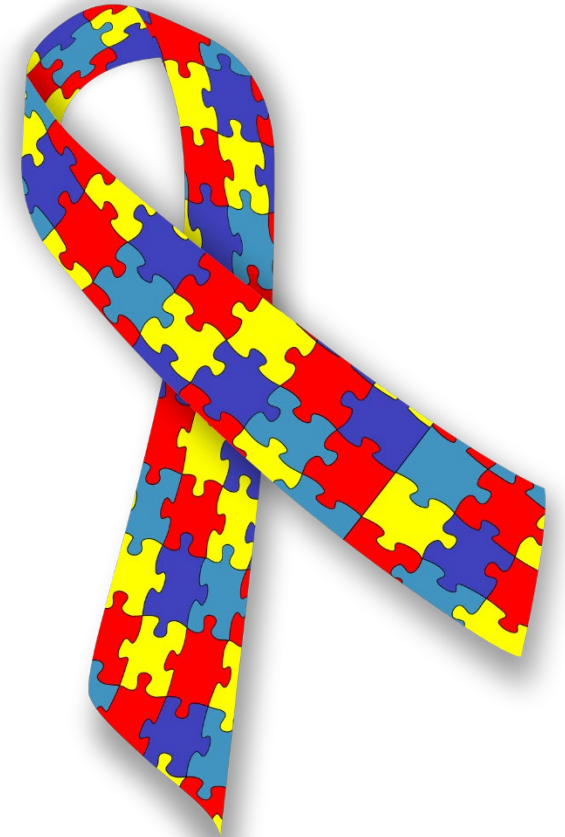
AUTISM

Resources

RESOURCES



- Southwest Autism Research & Resource Center
 - www.autismcenter.org
- Autism Society
 - www.autism-society.org





REFERENCES



- <https://www.autismspeaks.org/what-autism>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/data.html>
- <https://www.autismcenter.org/autism-defined>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/67/ss/ss6706a1.htm>
- <https://www.autismspeaks.org/what-autism/from-first-concern-to-action/learn-signs>
- <https://childmind.org/article/autism-and-stimming/>
- <https://www.autismparentingmagazine.com/understanding-calming-sensory-overload/>



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