Objectives
Identify behaviors and characteristics associated with autism
Review risk and safety issues
Review recognition and response options
Discuss ways law enforcement is working with the autism community

Why should first responders recognize autism?
Provide for the safety and welfare of all citizens--go home safe to your families
Make best use of available time & resources
Enhance communication skills
Avoid litigation

What is Autism?
Definition -- Autism is a developmental disability that typically appears during the first three years of life.
Autism is a broad-spectrum neurological disorder
Autism Spectrum Disorder, Asperger’s Syndrome, Pervasive Developmental Delay-Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS), Fragile X
Autism impacts the normal development of the brain in the areas of social interaction and communication skills

Incidence
More prevalent in males
Occurs in approximately 1-150 births (CDC, 2008)
Lasts a lifetime

A Spectrum Condition
Low, middle, high functioning
Independence level
Public safety & criminal justice risks

Public Safety Risks:
Accompanying medical conditions
Medication requirements
Behaviors draw attention--Increased 911 responses
High pain threshold, may not recognize danger
Sensory issues
Self-stimulating behaviors & unusual attachment to objects
Wandering
Up to seven times more contacts w/police (OSERS)

Criminal Justice Risks:
May not respond to stop or other commands
May invade personal space of others
Extreme reactions to changes in routine
May produce false confession or misleading statement
Parents or care providers unprepared to assist
Common reasons for assistance calls:
In area where no one knows him or her
Parent or caregiver actions misinterpreted
Caregiver becomes incapacitated
Retail settings
Behavior has become escalated
Medical emergency, fire or natural disaster

Suggested Responses
Make sure person is unarmed
Approach in quiet, non-threatening manner
Seek and use available information at scene
Talk calmly in moderated voice
Use simple & direct instructions
May need to repeat and rephrase questions
Allow for delayed response time
Ask if person has autism and for ID card
Avoid touching, if possible
Evaluate for injuries
Maintain safe distance
Be alert to sudden outbursts--be able to appear to retreat to deescalate
Be aware of sensory issues-fight or flight
Resist impulse to act quickly
Review handout & card

Is Sensory Over-stimulation a Factor?
Look for outward behaviors
Move person to a quiet place
Calm creates calm

Reduce Sensory Influences
Sirens, Lights & Radio
Crowds
K-9 Partner
Odors
Touch
Deescalation
Use available time
Use space, posture, positioning, buffers
Best approaches to avoid litigation

Restraint
Restrain with knowledge
Hypotonia-low muscle tone
Seizure
Resistance
Turn on side often
Continue communication
Model calm behavior
**Arrest & Incarceration**
Document autism in initial report
Be alert to unknown medical condition & medication requirements
Consider medical evaluation
Uplink alert supervisor, prosecutor and mental health professional for immediate evaluation
Alert jail authorities--person is at risk in general population
Contact caregivers

**Dangerous Wandering**
Leading source of law enforcement contact
Expect followup 911 calls re: traffic & home entries
Alzheimer’s parallel
Wandering prevention & care may look like abuse
Project Lifesaver, Take Me Home

**ID and informational handouts**
Photo-ID
ID medicalert bracelet or necklace
Clothing tags with name and phone numbers
Informational handout

**911 Data Base Alerts**
Dispatch operator training
Flag w/key data-Priority Dispatch
Operator alerts first responders
Offer program proactively

**Developing A Checklist for 911 Systems**
Name, physical description, photo
Parents, other caregivers and emergency contact persons names, home, cell and pager phone numbers
Attractions, locations, water sources
Sensory, medical, or dietary issues and requirements, if any
Likes, dislikes--approach and de-escalation techniques
Method of communication, if non-verbal - sign language, picture boards, written word
ID wear - jewelry, tags on clothes, printed handout card

**Offender Trends**
Physical, phone or internet stalking & threats
Shoplifting
Peeping Tom
Accomplice or sidekick
Sexually-based offenses
Other violent crimes

**Interview & Interrogation**
Usually mid to higher end of spectrum; independent:
Answers may seem unconnected Eye contact
May present as argumentative, inattentive
Influence of standard interrogation techniques
Videotape interrogation?
**Processing Information**
- During questioning, initial contact or in a courtroom setting
- Inability to quickly process and respond
- Be a poor listener
- Be unable to deduce what others are thinking and why they are thinking it
- Repeats words, statements, body language and mannerisms

**Communication Dilemmas: Interrogation**
- Language problem—expressive vs receptive
- Takes cues & clues from investigators
- Will do what it takes to keep a friend
- May produce false confession

**Tips for Interviewer/Interrogator: Be Patient**
- Be sure subject understands legal rights
- Pre-test for lying skills
- Ask questions that rely on narrative
- Ask series of unrelated yes/no questions to determine style and dependability
- Seek advice of/consider contacting a specialist
- Follow gut instincts

**Find Communication Success:**
- Involve people the person knows and trusts
- Describe beforehand (use photos) new persons and venues
- Assure that new persons/venues are safe
- Utilize fine rote memory skills
- Teach rules of program with visual aids
- Create a chronological list of the program
- Develop a poster with bullet points
- Use pictures to describe actions and situations

**People with Autism: Perfect Victims**
- Neighborhood Resentment
- Theft & street crime
- Restraint
- Criminal Gangs
- Verbal & physical intimidation
- Adult care
- Sexual abuse

**Restraint**
- Schools, child and adult care
- Training
- Restraint for compliance

**Criminal Gangs**
- Isolation in community
- Known to recruit persons with ASD and other DD’s to run drugs
- Manipulated by promises of friendship and belonging
- Left holding the bag
Verbal & Physical Intimidation
Targeted by bullies & tormenters
Harassment often escalates into physical assault
At school, work or home neighborhoods
May not recognize initial abuse and torment
Perpetrators proceed without fear of being caught

Adult Care Facilities
Workforce underpaid; under trained
Attractive to abusers: easy access to victims
Underreported: victims may not report incident or recognize the criminal act
Low credibility as victim-witness

Sexual Abuse
Naïve often passive nature
Women especially vulnerable
Adult care staff, family member or others encourage aberrant behavior, reward it or teach that it is normal
Eye contact
Sex and sexuality education

Investigation of disclosures of abuse or victimization
Are you the first to interview victim?
Interview others with knowledge away from scene
Establish work and relocation histories
Is this the first incident?
Sensitivity about hiring, background & litigation
May assume disclosure cannot be proven; choose not to report to law enforcement
Perpetrator could be other person w/disability

Victim-Witness Interviews: Specialized Training
Preparation--discuss w/prosecutor
Consider two interviews, videotape?
Seek fresh records & background information
Discover communication styles
Avoid use of body language to communicate
Use simple phrases & communication
Avoid authority clothes
Prepare questions in advance
Relaxed venue
Make sure words/terms used have same meaning to subject & interviewer
Establish alternative timelines
Be alert to fatigue
Pre-test for truth telling
(Review handout)

Partner, Plan & Practice
Partnerships: Law Enforcement, Schools, Parents
Plan cross educational opportunities for students with autism and Asperger’s syndrome and
first response professionals
Provide in a safe, non-threatening environment
Improve outcomes for both populations
Develop skills for careers and lifetimes
Life Skills Education for Persons with ASD
Early & often, suited to age and ability levels, delivered in school through IEP
Anticipate close scrutiny
How to interact well with law enforcement and first responders

Critical Life Skills are a Two-Way Street: Cross Educate
Recognize & respond to police
Stay with, not run from safe, go to persons
Reduce fear of uniform, badge, vehicles
Do not make sudden movements
How to remain calm
How to call for help; report incidents
How to carry and show ID & information card
Avoid being a victim
Demystify first responders
Police are people, too--moms, dads, neighbors
Videotape examples
Mock interviews
Reduce stress of sudden encounters
Use simple curriculum
Educate in a safe, relaxed, controlled environment
Practice at school & home--make part of daily routine

Programs to Consider
Community policing philosophy & programs
911 Data Base Alerts
Include autism issues-CIT
Roll call briefings
Recruit academy and veteran in-service training
Specialized interviewing skills
Identify and utilize objective autism resource persons
Cross-educational opportunities
Mental health courts, diversion, probation & incarceration
Establish partnerships with families, educators and autism advocacy groups

Summary
Enhance public & officer safety--reduce exposure to liability when you:
Recognize associated risks
Learn recognition and response options, utilize training
Apply communication and public relation skills
Work with people with autism, their families, caseworkers, and advocacy organizations

Video


Books


Chapters


**Articles**


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