

OASIS · AT A GLANCE

Preparing law enforcement for safe encounters

A stranger calls 911 because your autistic adult is rocking on a bench at the bus stop. What happens in the next four minutes is up to a stranger in a uniform. Here is how to load that stranger with the information they need before the call ever comes.

BY JIM PALASTY · 11 MIN READ · FAMILY SAFETY

1 in 5

POLICE CONTACT

Autistic youth stopped and questioned by police by age 21. The contact does not always end well.

How it works

THREE STEPS

STEP 1

Register your person



STEP 2

Build the packet



STEP 3

Practice the scripts

What goes in the Know My Person packet

Identification	Recent photo, full name, date of birth, address
Diagnosis	Autism spectrum, support level, co-occurring conditions
Communication	Verbal, AAC device, gestures, written only
Triggers	Loud voices, sirens, touch, flashing lights
De-escalation	Calming words, lower voice, give space, no touch
Behaviors	Stimming, scripting, gaze avoidance. Not signs of guilt.
Medical	Seizures, medications, allergies, restraint risks
Contacts	Family, guardian, case manager. 24-hour numbers.

A STORY WE KNOW

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David is 24. He was waiting for the 18B bus at midnight after his shift, flapping his hands the way he always does when the streetlight buzzes. A passing driver called 911 and said a man was acting suspicious. The first officer drew his Taser. David did not respond when ordered to put his hands up because David needs three seconds to process a sentence and four more to find the words. His case manager arrived with the laminated card in time. The officer apologized. We were lucky.

LUCKY IS NOT A SAFETY PLAN

What matters, at a glance

Eye contact

Officers are trained to read averted gaze as deception. For many autistic adults, eye contact is the deception. Name this in the packet.

Stimming

Hand flapping, rocking, vocalizations. Read by an untrained officer as agitation or drug use. Read by a trained one as regulation.

Use of force

Restraint, prone holds, and Tasers escalate sensory overload into life-threatening dysregulation. Document any history of restraint trauma in your packet.

Traffic stops

If your adult drives, a sun-visor card with the words "I am autistic. I will move slowly. I may not look at you. My ID is in the glove box" buys the thirty seconds that resets the entire encounter.

Processing delay

A direct verbal command can take three to ten seconds to register. Untrained officers read the pause as defiance. Train the officers. Train your adult to nod.

Public incidents

Mall security, store managers, transit police. The packet works for all of them. So does a laminated card the size of a driver's license.

BRING THESE · CHECK AS YOU GO

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Two laminated Know My Person cards | ☐ Photo of your adult on your phone home screen |
| ☐ Disability rights attorney number (county or state) | ☐ Guardianship or supported decision-making letter |
| ☐ Insurance card and primary doctor | ☐ One-page sensory and medical summary |
| ☐ Registry confirmation number | ☐ Pen and a small notepad |

YOUR MOVE

If your adult is detained, here is what you do

- 1 Get to the scene. Bring the packet. Identify yourself by relationship and authority.
- 2 Ask the supervising officer for permission to communicate with your adult.
- 3 Do not consent to questioning without counsel. Ever. Even if "nothing happened."
- 4 Write down badge numbers, times, and witness names while the scene is fresh.
- 5 Request the body camera footage in writing within 48 hours.
- 6 File a written commendation or complaint. Quiet feedback shapes future training.

Most encounters end well at step one or two. The ones that do not are the ones you need the rest of the ladder for.

RESOURCES NAMED IN THIS POST

Arc's National Center on Criminal Justice and Disability · <https://thearc.org/our-initiatives/criminal-justice/>

ASAN · <https://autisticadvocacy.org/>

International Association of Chiefs of Police · <https://www.theiacp.org/>

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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