Autism Society

Caregiver Tips: Interacting with Law Enforcement Officers

1. Consider registering with your local law enforcement agency.

What does disclosure look like for your family? Determine if disclosing your loved one's disability is in your family plan. Registering with your local law enforcement agency can be an important step in your family's safety plan.

Many police and sheriff agencies provide an identification form that includes specific information like:

- Allergies
- A photo of your loved one
- Eloping or wandering tendencies
- Medication and dietary needs
- Personality traits
- Sensory behaviors

This information is generally added to an agency's dispatch office, so officers have this information if called to your home. Contact your local Autism Society affiliate for additional information.

2. Carry Identification

It may be beneficial to have your loved one carry an ID card or medical bracelet that provides basic information, medical diagnosis, and emergency contact numbers. There are many free resources online to find such ID cards and you can also contact your local law enforcement agency or Autism Society affiliate.

Practice communicating personal information such as name, address, and phone number with your loved one. If they are non-speaking, assist them in adding their contact information to their communication device, or practice writing onto paper, or typing their information into a laptop, tablet or electronic device.

3. Interacting with a Law Enforcement Officer

Everyone is expected to obey the law and rules in your community, regardless of disability or circumstance. Social stories and visual aids can be helpful in practicing safe and appropriate interactions with law enforcement.

Share these tips to assist your loved one in interacting with a law enforcement officer to ensure a safe and positive interaction.

- **When an officer approaches, stay where you are.**
  - Do your best to stay in the space you are in and allow the officer to approach you.
  - Do not approach the officer.
- **Keep your hands out of your pockets.**
  - It is good practice to keep your hands where the law enforcement officer can always see them.
  - Do not reach for your identification or anything unless the officer asks you to do so.
- **Do not attempt to touch or hug a law enforcement officer.**
  - Law enforcement officers carry guns and tools on their person.
  - They may mistake your gesture for trying to grab their gun or personal items.
- **Disclose your diagnosis to the officer.**
  - It is understandable that an interaction with law enforcement can be a high stress situation.
  - The officer may not understand the difficulties you are having.
  - Disclosure can create an opportunity to advocate for your needs.

4. Educate your local police or sheriff's department.

Visit your local precinct and introduce your loved one to officers and staff.

Not only is it important for law enforcement to get to know your loved one, but this will facilitate a positive first interaction with law enforcement.

Encourage your local police department to conduct regular and meaningful law enforcement trainings or work with your local Autism Society affiliate.