

SAFETY TIPS FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

Individuals with autism are 7 times more likely to have interactions with police and other first responders than their typical peers. Not only as victims but also as suspects. Below are some steps that families and individuals can take to help make these interactions more positive.

Contact your local police department to set up an appointment to talk about your child or adult who may need additional support or consideration.

A premise Alert Form and program was developed in Chester County Pennsylvania but can be used in any community, county or state. It allows families to voluntarily send pertinent information to the local police department and the 911 center. Check out my website to find a copy you can freely download.

www.dol.net/~srz/

Get to know your neighbors. They are your first line of defense.

Teach your child to respond vocally and to come when their name is called.

Teach your child to give name, address and phone number either verbally, written, typed or to provide a card of Identification.

Teach them to carry a wallet and present identification when asked. Set up situations where new people would ask for ID.

Set up field trips to the police department, fire station and paramedic station.

Ask the local police department to send an officer to intercept and request ID from the students during a community outing.

Teach your child to go to a uniformed police officer if they are ever in trouble, lost or need help.

Work with your IEP team to develop safe living skills.

Give your child or student opportunities to meet and talk with first responders in non-emergency situations.

Write social stories to teach them how to interact with the police, fire fighter or paramedic.

Teach your child to recognize police, paramedics and firefighters. School and support groups can organize trips to these places to familiarize children with these professionals. Contact these departments and request a visit to special needs classes and Approved Private Schools. Let the professionals know the age functioning level of the classes they will attend so they can bring appropriate information. Check out the “Utilizing Police in Schools” handout.

More independent teens and young adults need to be aware how to act around police. If your car is pulled over or you are stopped on the street, it would be wise to have ID and present it with a card that gives some information about autism and a contact person. Check out ARC publication “Know your rights”

Teach them not to run away from an officer.

Teach them that it is important to respond and comply with an officer’s requests.

ID Cards: a wide variety for many purposes:

Fill out a Critical Medical Information Form and keep it in the car.

Photo ID’s that show family and child together in a home setting. Both parents and child carry a copy either in a wallet or pocket. If a tantrum in a public setting occurs and the police or security guards come you will be able to prove that this child or adult is supposed to be with you. It could prevent a long wait in a security office or police station. Teachers can do the same with a wallet sized class photo that aides and students can all carry. —

Medic Alert Bracelets use them if you can, they also come as necklaces. IF your child will wear it GET IT. If not try consider threading the medic alert bracelet into shoes laces, use as a zipper pull, attach it on a belt loop, or put on the back of a belt. Some Medic Alert tags work like a locket so that the information can’t be read without the person’s knowledge or consent.

**Many adults now have and wear work ID tags, it wouldn’t be socially inappropriate to have one made for your teen or adult but don’t put the diagnosis on it. Just a notation “if in need of assistance please call _____”
A photo, name, contact number and as little other information as possible.**

Teach them not quickly reach into their jackets or the glove box without telling an officer what they are doing.

ALARM SYSTEMS

Alarm systems range from \$10.00 to hundreds of dollars depending on what you decide you need. For \$10.00 you can go to Linen and Things and get a simple stick on alarm that every time the door opens it goes off. For under \$50 you can buy a system from [www. Alzstore.com](http://www.Alzstore.com) that is slightly more advanced and allows for chimes as well as the very loud alarm setting. There are hardwired in systems hat families can purchase and are monitored. I caution families to be aware of having a system that automatically calls the police because of the problem with to many false alarms. If you're a family that is organized and consistent then they are great options. If funding is a problem if you are in the MR system family driven funds can be used to provide security systems.

There are GPS and other electronic systems that require the individual to wear a tracking device. Some communities have Project Lifesaver Programs, which are excellent options for repeat runners.

Service dogs have been trained to alert families if a child goes to far from the house or even attempt to restrain young children who are attempting to leave.

Fence the yard if possible. Some townships, boroughs will allow a variance for a child with a disability. Church groups, scout organizations and some community groups (Lions, Elk, Rotary...) may be willing to put up fences for families if they can't afford to do it themselves.

Perimeter alert systems are available; they too require some type of receiver. They do make some that are portable so you can take them on vacation.

Vacationing brings new worries because you don't know the area and all the problems. Families can create temporary tattoos using specialized paper available from office supply or craft store to put the child's first name and a cell phone number. Put it on the upper shoulder or just below the collar on a child. Families have to decide if this is appropriate for their child.

Fill out and provide a Vacation Premise Alert Form to the local police department if you are staying in a town. In a resort ask the concierge whom you should provide this information to. On your last day it is a good idea to call the police department

and let them know that you are leaving and they can destroy the form. Also thank them for their assistance and tell them you appreciate their efforts.

There are portable alarm systems that either are magnetized or clip to doors and windows for when you are traveling. Check out Radio Shack and other electronic stores.

Visit a locksmith; there are metal clamshells that lock onto a doorknob with a key that make it impossible to turn a handle.

WHEN TO AND WHEN NOT TO CALL THE POLICE:

Call 911 if your child is missing, having a medical emergency or is a danger to himself or others

DO NOT CALL IF:

- Your child refuses to do their homework, take out the trash, go to school or go to bed or get out of bed.
- You are using the police as a threat. If you don't _____ I'll call the police. We especially, need to make sure that our children see the police as the good guys. Their lives may depend on it.

KNOW THAT IF YOU CALL THE POLICE DURING A VIOLENT EPISODE THEY MAY VERY WELL HANDCUFF AND TAKE YOUR CHILD INTO CUSTODY. Which will mean a juvenile detention or psychiatric setting. It can be a long process to get them back after you have entered the Juvenile Justice System. If violent outbursts are common work with, the IEP team, the mental health crisis intervention team and any other support systems you have to set up a plan that is acceptable to you and your family.

Some individuals with autism are capable of forming intent, which means that they are capable of committing a crime and culpable if they do commit a crime. The diagnosis is not a get out of jail free card and cannot be a blanket excuse for criminal behavior. It is imperative that families work with the authorities to make sure that the best possible outcome occurs in all situations.

Susan F. Rzucidlo compiled this information from families and police officers across the nation. More information for first responders can be found at www.dol.net/~srz PERMISSION: You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that you do NOT alter the wording in any way, you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction and you leave this notice on the reproductions