

# Autism

## COMMUNICATION

### *The person you are interacting with:*

- May be non verbal or have limited verbal skills
- May not respond to your commands or questions
- May repeat your words & phrases; your body language and emotional reactions
- May have difficulty expressing needs

## BEHAVIOR

- May display tantrums or extreme distress for no apparent reason
- May laugh, giggle or ignore your presence
- May be extremely sensitive to lights, sounds or touch
- May display a lack of eye contact
- May have no fear of real danger
- May appear insensitive to pain
- May exhibit self-stimulating behavior: hand flapping, body rocking or attachment to objects

## IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE SITUATIONS

- May not understand rights or warnings
- May become anxious in new situations
- May not understand consequences of their actions
- If verbal, may produce false confession or misleading statement

As with Alzheimers patients, persons with autism may wander. Persons with autism may be attracted to water sources, roadways, or peer into and enter dwellings.

## TIPS FOR INTERACTIONS WITH PERSONS WITH AUTISM

- Display calming body language; give person extra personal space
- Use simple language
- Speak slowly, repeat and rephrase questions
- Use concrete terms and ideas; avoid slang
- Allow extra time for response
- Give praise and encouragement
- Exercise caution during restraint
- Person may have seizure disorders and low muscle tone
- Avoid positional asphyxia. Keep airway clear. Turn person on side often.
- Given time and space, person may deescalate their behavior
- Seek advice from others on the scene who know the person with autism

If in custody, alert jail authorities. Consider initial isolation facility. Person would be at risk in general prison population. **REMEMBER:** Each individual with autism is unique and may act or react differently. **PLEASE** contact a professional who is familiar with autism.

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