

For More Information:

Autism Society of America
1-800-3AUTISM
www.autism-society.org

Autism Society of Washington
(Toll free) 888 ASW 4 YOU
Email: info@autismsocietyofwa.org
Web: www.autismsocietyofwa.org

University of Washington
Autism Center
206-221-6806
<http://depts.washington.edu/uwautism/>

Families for Early
Autism Treatment (FEAT)
206-763-3373
Web: www.feat.org

Autism Outreach Project
1-888-704-9633
Email: autism@esd189.org
Web: www.esd189.org/autism

Northwest Autism Center
509-328-1582 or 888-467-8760
Email: info@nwautism.org
Web: www.nwautism.org

The Arc of Washington State
888-754-8798
Web: www.arcwa.org



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In Memory of Aiven Justin Pili DeCastro

Autism Society of Washington
P.O. Box 111624
Tacoma, WA
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AUTISM
SOCIETY OF
WASHINGTON

**What
Law
Enforcement
(and other First Responders)
Should
Know
About
AUTISM**



AUTISM FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT

What is Autism?

The Autistic Spectrum Disorders are a group of neuro-developmental disorders that vary widely in severity, but include impairments in communication, socialization, and restricted or repetitive patterns of behavior. The degree of impairment varies greatly from severe to mild symptoms. Autistic Disorder is classified as one of the Pervasive Developmental Disorders, which include Asperger's Disorder, Childhood Disintegrative Disorder, Rett's Disorder, and Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (PDDNOS). Asperger's and PDD-NOS are sometimes viewed as milder forms of autism or "high functioning autism." Autism is a life-long disorder, but one in which significant improvement can occur over time. The cause of autism is not known. It has been found to be a genetic disorder.

What are Characteristics of Autism?

The most common presenting complaint in Autism is delayed or lack of language development. A key feature is also abnormal social development. Problems become evident in early processes of interaction such as joint attention and attachment. There may be poor eye contact, a delay in responding to their name, and a lack of pointing or other gestures. Repetitive, stereotyped motor movements are often present. Using toys with repetitive motions such as spinning can be calming. Cognitive testing tends to show strengths in nonverbal abilities. Isolated savant skills are often talked about, but present only in a minority. Higher functioning children may seem to converse well with adults, but still have difficulty understanding a conversation. They have better understanding when there are visuals to accompany auditory instructions. The prevalence of autistic spectrum disorders is now about 1 in 110 children being diagnosed with an autistic spectrum disorder. Males are affected 4-5 times more often than females. If a child is a known "runner" and escapes, they are often attracted to water so check homes with pools, lakes, or other nearby bodies of water.

What are basic things to look for?

Communication:

- May be non-verbal
- May repeat phrases instead of responding to questions
- May give only one answer for all questions
- May give answers they feel will please the person questioning them rather than accurate information
- May not respond right away or appear to be ignoring
- May not know how to ask for help in understanding what is being asked
- May have a monotone voice
- May speak very loudly
- May perseverate on one subject they are interested in that has nothing to do with what you ask
- May take "expressions" as literal questions such as "Are you pulling my leg?"
- May not be able to see things from your point of view
- Can be bluntly honest in their observations with no regard to impact of what they say
- May engage in interaction with total strangers without regard to their safety

Social Interaction:

- May have difficulty recognizing dangerous situations
- May have difficulty gauging personal space
- May have difficulty understanding social cues
- May not understand jokes or joking communication
- May appear to act more like a child than an adult
- May not recognize an officers as an official person nor understand what response are expected to that uniform.

Behaviors:

- May appear to be drunk or high on drugs
- May scream/tantrum uncontrollably
- May exhibit "stimming" behaviors such as hand flapping, finger flipping or hand twirling, rocking, hitting themselves, repetitive noises, etc.
- May run away when approached or told to "Stop"
- May have little or no eye contact
- May dislike changes in routine
- May have auditory/visual sensory difficulties with strong reactions to sirens, flashing lights, loud commands, etc.
- May resort to self-abusive behaviors (headbanging, etc.)
- May show insensitivity to pain or extreme temperatures
- Seizure disorders are often common with autism
- "Runners" will wander off without regard to safety

How should Law Enforcement Officers respond?

Here are some guidelines for interactions with individuals with autism:

- Use clear, direct phrases and instructions, short and to the point
- Use visual aides/pictures when needed
- Use spinning toys for calming tools
- Allow extra time for responses, repeating or rewording if necessary
- Speak calmly and in a low voice
- Avoid quick movements
- Be alert for verbal/behavioral outbursts
- Try verbal calming techniques and keep a safe distance during tantrums/outbursts
- Do not touch the person if possible
- Turn off lights and sirens
- Check for any injuries, even if not obvious
- If arrested, keep away from the general jail population as abuse could happen
- If a runner is missing, search bodies of water

Where can Law Enforcement get more autism information?

- L.E.A.N. On Us - www.leanonus.org (has a quiz for law enforcement, Autism ID cards, and was created by law enforcement officers who are married with a child with autism)
- WA State Criminal Justice Training Commission - Al Isaac aisaac@cjtc.state.wa.us
- Dennis Debbaudt Agency
www.policeandautismcjb.org (772) 398-9756



The Autism Society of Washington is a non-profit organization that relies on donations from caring individuals and businesses in order that we can continue to provide resources and information to educators, parents, and professionals. If you can help us with a tax deductible donation of any amount, or know someone else who can, please mail the donation to:

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