**About Autism: Tips for First Responders**

### About Autism

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental diagnosis that impacts how a person communicates, learns, and experiences their world. Autistic people often have:

- challenges communicating with others
- restricted interests and repetitive behaviors
- difficulty regulating emotions (especially in challenging situations)
- atypical experiences of / responses to sensory input (lights, sounds, smells, tastes, etc.)

Autism is known as a spectrum disorder because there is wide variation in the way that people experience the above characteristics.

### Tips for Interaction

**Don’t Assume:** Do not assume the individual will respond to ‘stop’ or other commands or questions

**Allow Space:** Give the individual time and space, and avoid the use of restraint

**Stay Calm:** Maintain a calm and relaxed demeanor, if sitting, get down on their level

**Offer Water/ Snack:** Hold it out to the individual

**Simplify Language:** Use simple, literal phrases

**Reassure:** Even if the person is nonverbal, offer reassurance

**Offer Tools:** Offer a phone, iPad, or paper/pen to communicate—these items may also calm the individual

### Tips for Search & Rescue

**Act Quickly:** People with autism may head straight to water, traffic, or abandoned cars/areas, so treat each case as critical regardless of age

**Search Water First:** Search any type of nearby water, including waste water

**Ask Questions:** Ask the caregiver if the individual will respond to his/her name, and about likes/dislikes (Will they be drawn to certain music, favorite characters, fire trucks, mom’s voice? Or afraid of certain noises, sirens, search dogs?)

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**The Autism Project**  
[www.theautismproject.org](http://www.theautismproject.org)

**Public Safety Special Needs Coalition**  
[www.PSSNCRI.com](http://www.PSSNCRI.com)