

## COMMUNICATION QUICK TIPS for Supporting Crime Victims with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD)



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COMMUNICATION QUICK TIPS  
5th Edition (2016)

Developmental Disability is: A. Manifested before the person reaches twenty-two (22) years of age; B. Constitutes a substantial disability to the affected individual; C. Attributable to intellectual disability or related conditions, which include cerebral palsy, epilepsy, autism or other neurological conditions, when such conditions result in either impairment of general intellectual functioning or adaptive behavior similar to that of a person with an intellectual disability. D. Not attributable to only a physical or sensory impairment or a mental illness.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a developmental disability affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction. ASD refers to a range of abilities and levels of function and includes those with low or high functioning Autism, Asperger's, Pervasive Developmental Disability (PDD) and Rett Syndrome. ASD does NOT specifically relate to an Intelligence Quotient (I.Q.) score.

Intellectual Disability (ID) is a developmental disability that is diagnosed by determining that an I.Q. is lower than 70 (the average I.Q. is 100) and includes deficits in adaptive skill areas (e.g. self-care, communication, health/safety, etc.). Many individuals with ID are taught to be obedient and obey those in authority. Individuals with ID generally have poor attention spans, lack age-appropriate behavior, tend to follow and imitate, and think very concretely.

People with a developmental disability are NOT mentally ill but may have a dual diagnosis including a mental illness.

Law Enforcement should document disabilities  
in ALL records.

**People with Intellectual Disability (ID)\***

1. Pay attention to verbal and non-verbal language for both yourself and the individual.
2. Speak to individuals in a manner matching their chronological age, not perceived intellectual age.
3. Match your questions to the individual's intellectual ability (e.g. if responses are in 2 or 3 word sentences, ask questions in short sentences).
4. When referring to people, places, and acts, use proper names. Be clear to avoid confusion with pronouns, e.g., "you," "he," "they," "them."
5. Avoid questions that are leading or posed in the negative (e.g. "Do you *not* like going to school?" Instead say, "Do you like going to school?").
6. Do not use lists, such as, "Was it Tom, Dick, or Harry?" The person may say Tom although Dan is the actual abuser, but since Dan wasn't listed, it wasn't a choice. It may be better to ask, "Who hurt you," or to ask questions one at a time such as, "Was it Tom?"; "Was it Dick?"; "Was it Harry?"
7. Ask the same question 2 or 3 times in different ways to make sure you are getting a consistent answer.

**People with Intellectual Disability (ID)\***

8. Minimize getting a false response based on desire to please:
  - Keep your body language neutral (e.g. try not to nod or shake your head during responses).
  - Avoid interrogative statements (e.g. "You weren't at home?").
  - Avoid conversational punctuations (e.g. "Good" or "Yes") because they may be taken literally.
  - Resist temptation to fill in the blanks (e.g. a broken statement of: "Paul...touch....penis" should not be followed with: "Paul touched your penis?" because Paul could have been touching his own penis.)
9. Do not praise based on a specific response; rather, provide praise in between questions so as not to influence responses.
10. Use daily activities as a reference for determining time when an individual with an ID has difficulty with the concept of time. (e.g. before breakfast versus early morning or at 8:00 AM.)
11. Expect to take more time.

*\*Adapted with permission from "A Law Enforcement Guide for Working with Children with Autism, Intellectual and Communication Disabilities." Written by Scott Modell, Ph.D. and Marcie Davis, M.S.; funded by New Mexico Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs, Inc.*

**People with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)\***

- 1. Be calm, literal and concrete when speaking:** Maintain a calm, even manner of speech. Avoid touching the person. Avoid using metaphors: instead of saying, "Let's get the ball rolling," use "We will begin now."
- 2. Avoid sarcasm.** It may be difficult for individuals with ASD to interpret tone. Remarking sarcastically, "the traffic is so smooth today" when there is heavy traffic may be confusing — they may take you literally.
- 3. Pragmatic deficits in communication are common** (how close someone is to you when speaking, talking about odd topics, inappropriate laughing, lack of eye contact) and do not imply lack of intelligence, disrespect or deceitfulness.
- 4. When echolalia occurs** (repeating what was just heard) be patient, build rapport to reduce anxiety, and continue to try and communicate.
- 5. Do not interpret monotone** voice or lack of emotion as lying or lack of ability to feel. These traits are often typical for people with ASD.
- 6. If possible, remove anything that may be distracting** (e.g., uniform, badge, gun, watch) — a person with ASD may become fixated on items and have difficulty staying on point. Turn off flashing lights and distracting sounds.
- 7. Seek assistance** when you think you will need it.
- 8. Expect to take more time.**

**Mandatory Reporting and People with IDD —The Law**  
If mistreatment (abuse, caretaker neglect or exploitation) of an At-Risk Elder and/or an At-Risk Adult with IDD is observed, OR if there is reasonable cause to believe that an At-Risk Elder and/or an At-Risk Adult with IDD has been abused, is a victim of caretaker neglect or is being exploited, OR is at imminent risk of abuse, caretaker neglect or exploitation, the information **SHALL** be reported to a law enforcement agency within 24 hours after the observation or discovery.

**Law Enforcement is required to take a report of mistreatment from a mandated reporter.**

- Law Enforcement must notify Human Services/Adult Protective Services (APS) and the office of the District Attorney of the report.
- If appropriate, Law Enforcement will conduct and complete a criminal investigation and file a report with Human Services/APS and the District Attorney. The District Attorney will determine whether the filing of criminal charges is appropriate.

**SELF NEGLECT IS NOT A CRIME.**

*ADULT PROTECTIVE SERVICES CAN INVESTIGATE SELF NEGLECT WITHOUT CONTACTING LAW ENFORCEMENT.*

**How to know whether a person has an IDD?**

The only way to absolutely know that an individual has an IDD is through formal diagnosis. If a person is in disability services, this assessment has likely been done. Further, asking an individual whether he/she has an IDD may or may not result in a useful answer. Other options include asking whether the person has a case manager or resource coordinator at a CCB (Community Centered Board) or whether he/she had an IEP (Individual Educational Plan) in school, and, if the answer is yes, the individual may have an IDD.

### What is Mistreatment?

Mistreatment is abuse, caretaker neglect and exploitation.

#### Abuse:

Any of the following acts or omissions:

- Non-accidental bodily injury, serious bodily injury or death.
- Confinement or restraint that is unreasonable under generally accepted caretaking standards.
- Subjection to nonconsensual sexual conduct or contact.

#### Caretaker Neglect:

- Failure to timely or adequately provide food, clothing, shelter or essential services (medical, psychological, etc.), supervision or any other treatment necessary for health or safety.
- Knowing harassment, undue influence or intimidation to create a hostile or fearful environment.

#### Exploitation:

Any of the following acts or omissions:

- Uses deception, harassment, intimidation, or undue influence to permanently or temporarily deprive an at-risk person of the use, benefit, or possession of anything of value.
- Employs a third party for the profit or advantage of the person or another person to the detriment of the at-risk person.
- Forces, compels, coerces, or entices Elder/person with IDD against his/her will to perform services for the profit or advantage of any person.
- Misuses the property of Elder/person with IDD in a manner that adversely affects that person's ability to receive healthcare or healthcare benefits or to pay bills for basic needs or obligations.

### DISABILITY RESOURCES



The Arcs advocate for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Hours vary.

**ADVOCACYDENVER**  
(City and County of Denver)  
303.831.7733

**The Arc of Adams County**  
(Adams county except for the City of Aurora)  
303.428.0310

**The Arc of Arapahoe & Douglas Counties**  
(Arapahoe and Douglas Counties except for the City of Aurora)  
303.220.9228

**The Arc of Aurora**  
(City of Aurora)  
720.213.1420

**The Association for Community Living In Boulder County**  
(Boulder & Broomfield Counties)  
303.527.0888

**The Arc of Colorado**  
(all areas not here identified)  
303.864.9334

**The Arc — Jefferson, Clear Creek & Gilpin Counties**  
303.232.1338

**The Arc of Larimer County**  
970.204.6991

**The Arc of Mesa County**  
(Mesa County and other Western slope areas)  
970.245.5775

**The Arc of the Pikes Peak Region**  
(El Paso, Park, and Teller Counties)  
719.471.4800

**The Arc of Pueblo**  
(Pueblo and Huerfano Counties)  
719.545.5845

**The Arc of Southwest Colorado**  
(La Plata, Montezuma, Archuleta, Dolores, and San Juan Counties)  
970.422.2271

**The Arc of Weld County**  
(Weld County and other Northeastern areas)  
970.353.5219

**The Arc of West Central CO** (Delta, Montrose, Gunnison, Hinsdale, San Miguel and Ouray Counties)  
970.901.0707

Community Centered Boards  
Case Management services for people with IDD.  
[https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/hcpf/  
community-centered-boards](https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/hcpf/community-centered-boards)