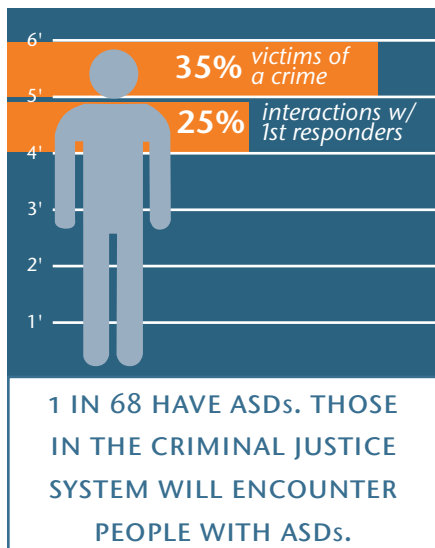


Pathways to Justice™: *Get the Facts*

AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD)



Facts

- About 1 in 68 children has been identified with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) according to estimates from CDC's Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) Network¹
- ASD is not a mental illness, but a neurologically based developmental disability that significantly impairs the ability to communicate and to interact in a socially appropriate manner.
- Some people with ASD have co-occurring disabilities like intellectual disabilities or mental illness.

Criminal Justice Involvement

- With 1 in 68 children (one in 42 boys) being identified with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), law enforcement officers and all involved in the criminal justice system WILL ENCOUNTER those with autism. It is imperative to be trained.
- Individuals with ASD are taught compliance from a young age, increasing vulnerability to victimization.
- A survey of individuals with ASD and their families indicated that 35% had been the victim of a crime and 23% interacted with first responders due to wandering or eloping.²
- Of that 35% who had been the victim of a crime, 17% reported physical abuse or assault, 13% reported being the victim of sexual abuse, 9% reported property crimes, 8% reported sexual assault, and 8% reported neglect; 3% reported being coerced to commit or participate in a crime.³

Identification

- May not be able to maintain eye contact
- May have sensory issues, including sensitivity to loud noises, bright lights, strong smells, and touch
- May engage in calming behaviors (also referred to as stimming) like hand flapping or rocking
- Processing delays and difficulty following verbal commands or reading body language
- Attempts to run or move away from confrontation
- Compliant—unquestioning regarding rules, agreeable



National Center on Criminal
Justice & Disability NCCJD™

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Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Fact Sheet

Communication Tips

- Do not mistake echolalia—repeating what you say—as rude behavior. It is a typical display of autistic behavior
- Give ample time for a response to instructions or questions
- Do not interrupt self-calming mechanisms behaviors like rocking back and forth, flicking fingers, humming or buzzing, etc.
- Be prepared for a wide range of assistive communication devices, sign language, or writing
- Consider using fixation on a topic or object to help you interact or divert challenging behavior
- Avoid physical contact whenever possible
- Look for signs that the person is unable to fully understand what happened to them when it comes to describing abuse or understanding that their actions were criminal

Individual Story

Reginald “Neli” Latson has an IQ of 69 and ASD. His encounter with law enforcement led to his continual confinement in a “segregation cell”—Virginia’s version of solitary confinement. On the day of the incident, Neli was waiting for the public library to open when a concerned citizen called the police to report a suspicious person. When police arrived, Neli was unable to provide his name and injured an officer in an attempt to flee the confrontation. Since his time in jail, Neli continues to face prosecution for behavior clearly related to his diagnosis of ASD. Neli remains engaged in a preventable “never ending

downward spiral of completely avoidable charges of criminal assault.”⁴

Remember

ASD is a spectrum disorder. Some individuals may appear to be functioning at a high level cognitively due to their extensive vocabulary, language skills and intelligence. They still have a significant social impairment, which criminal justice professionals must account for.

Resources

Autism Society

www.autism-society.org/living-with-autism/how-the-autism-society-can-help/safe-and-sound/

Autism Speaks

www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/autism-safety-project/first-responders/law-enforcement

The Law Enforcement Awareness Network

leanonus.org/

¹ http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss6302a1.htm?_cid=ss6302a1_w

² (Autism Society, 2006) see: http://www.autism-society.org/files/2014/04/Law_Enforcement_and_Other_First_Responders.pdf

³ (Autism Society, 2007).

⁴ http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/ruth-marcus-in-virginia-a-cruel-and-unusual-punishment-for-autism/2014/11/14/9d7f6108-6c3b-11e4-b053-65cea7903f2e_story.html