



## **NORTH MIAMI POLICE DEPARTMENT**



### *STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES*

#### **AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER 400.18**

EFFECTIVE DATE: 02-23-22

APPROVED:

  
Chief of Police

SUPERSEDES: 10-23-20

CFA: 15.18

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#### **I. PURPOSE**

To provide Department members with information that may assist them in recognizing the symptoms and characteristics of an individual with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) that may lead to improved communication and responses based on this understanding.

#### **II. POLICY**

In compliance with Florida State Statutes 943.0439 and 943.1727, the Department will make a good-faith effort to provide professional assistance, upon request, to individuals with ASD who are victims, suspects or defendants. In addition, training will be provided to Department personnel to enhance the recognition and communication with individuals with ASD.

#### **III. SCOPE**

This policy applies to all members of the Department.

#### IV. DEFINITIONS

- A. **Autism Spectrum Disorder** - A neurodevelopmental condition of variable severity with lifelong effects that can be recognized from early childhood, and is mainly characterized by difficulties with social interaction, communication and by restricted or repetitive patterns of thought and behavior. ASD now includes several conditions that used to be diagnosed separately, i.e., autistic disorder, pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS), and Asperger syndrome.
- B. **Developmental Disability** - A disorder or syndrome that is attributable to intellectual disability, cerebral palsy, autism, spina bifida, down syndrome, Phelan-McDermid syndrome, or Prader-Willie syndrome; that manifests before the age of 18; and that constitutes a substantial handicap that can reasonably be expected to continue indefinitely.
- C. **Professional** - Psychiatrist, psychologist, mental health counselor, special education instructor, clinical social worker, or related professional. The professional must have experience treating, teaching, or assisting patients or clients who have been diagnosed with ASD, or related developmental disability, or must be certified in special education with concentration focused on persons with ASD.
- D. **Stereotypies / Stimming** - A behavior consisting of repetitive actions or movements that may be displayed by persons with developmental disorders. Stimming is a form of self-regulation.
- E. **Echolalia** - Automatic or effortless repetition of another person's spoken words as if echoing them.
- F. **Language Clarification:**
  - Should: Indicates a general or expected action, absent a rational basis for failing to conform.
  - Shall or Will: Indicates a mandatory action.

#### V. GENERAL UNDERSTANDING

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 1 in 54 children

have been identified with ASD, which they define as a developmental disability that can cause significant social, communication and behavioral challenges. Individuals with ASD may communicate, interact, behave and learn differently, while their range of abilities can vary from gifted to severely challenged.

A. Some common indicators of individuals with ASD include:

1. Not responding to their name.
2. Avoiding eye contact.
3. Having trouble understanding other people's feelings or talking about their own feelings.
4. Having trouble recalling recent events.
5. Repeating words or phrases over and over (echolalia).
6. Giving unrelated answers to questions.
7. Getting upset by minor changes.
8. Flapping hands, rocking, spinning items or spinning in circles (known as stereotypies or stimming).
9. Having unusual reactions to the way things sound, smell, taste, look, or feel.

B. Strategies for officers when interacting with persons with ASD:

1. If there are people around who know the individual, listen to what they have to say, as they may have important information about the person, such as whether they are non-verbal, easily overwhelmed by a certain situation, and whether the behavior being demonstrated is common to that individual.
2. Approach the person calmly, use a calm voice and reassure them that you are there to help, as they may model what they see and begin to de-escalate.
3. Avoid repeatedly asking the same questions or commands. It may take a person with ASD longer to process what you are saying. An officer may have to reword or paraphrase a question in order to elicit an appropriate response. Ask questions and allow some time for a response.
4. Persons with ASD may not understand metaphors or sarcasm, so use literal commands.

5. Persons with ASD may be hypersensitive to even the slightest touch. This may create a fight or flight response. If the situation dictates that you must touch them, warn them that you are going to touch them.
6. Reduce overstimulation. If safe to do so, turn off lights and sirens, turn down police radios, and limit the number of people interacting directly with the individual.
7. Do not interfere with stimming. Stimming is a form of self-regulation. If a person with ASD is stimming and there is no officer safety concern, allow them to continue. This includes allowing a person to pace, flap, spin, and rock, amongst other “stims.”
8. Seek alternative forms of communication. Many persons with ASD use alternative forms of communication, such as iPad, American Sign Language or picture exchange cards.
9. Personal boundaries: Persons with ASD may not understand personal boundaries. They may stand too close or may attempt to touch a first responder or their equipment, which officers may perceive as a threat.

## **VI. REQUIREMENT FOR REQUESTING A PROFESSIONAL**

When an individual who is a victim, suspect, or defendant diagnosed with ASD, or their parent or guardian, requests a professional to be present during an interview, the interviewing Department member shall (for any interview thereafter) take the following steps: **CFA 15.18**

- A. Advise the individual making the request for a professional that all expenses related to the attendance of the professional at the interview shall be borne by the requesting individual. If the individual making the request for a professional is a victim, the defendant may be required to reimburse the victim for all expenses related to the attendance of the professional at the interview as part of restitution.
- B. Ask the individual making the request for a professional if they have a specific professional they would like to request. If so, obtain the professional's contact information and contact them for assistance. The individual making the request for a professional may also contact the professional directly, if they prefer.

C. If the individual making the request does not have a specific professional they would like to request, the interviewing officer, or designee, shall contact the following organization to seek assistance:

The Center for Autism and Related Disabilities  
5665 Ponce de Leon Blvd., 2<sup>nd</sup> floor  
Coral Gables, Florida 33146  
1-800-928-8476 (1-800-9-AUTISM)

D. The interviewing officer, or designee, shall document all attempts to obtain a qualified professional for an interview.

E. If, after a good faith effort has been made to locate a professional without success, the interviewing officer will notify the on-duty supervisor and may begin an interview without a professional present.

1. Failure to have a professional present at the time of the interview is not a basis for suppression of the statement, or the contents of the interview, or for cause of action against the interviewing officer or the Department.
2. If proceeding with an interview without a professional present, the interviewer will be mindful of the degree of severity in communication with the individual and the need for the interview. In addition, the interviewer will follow the procedures established in the Investigations policy, 300.07, relating to interviews, to include giving the individual access to restrooms, water, and comfort breaks as requested or as needed.

## **VII. TRAINING**

The Training Unit will conduct initial and periodic training on the contents of this policy to all affected agency members.

Periodic training will include instruction on the recognition of the symptoms and characteristics of an individual with Autism Spectrum Disorder and appropriate responses to an individual exhibiting such symptoms and characteristics.