



INTERACTIONS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

CLEET #: 21-2264

Cory Sutton; Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services

INTRODUCTION:

Daily, law enforcement officers encounter a multitude of individuals in emergency situations. Police are trained to respond to a crisis situation with a certain protocol, but this protocol may not always be the best way to interact with people with autism. Because police are usually the first to respond to an emergency, it is critical that officers have a working knowledge of autism and the wide variety of behaviors people with autism can exhibit in emergency situations. Teaching first responders the signs of autism is an important first step toward preventing unfortunate situations that may result in injury, lawsuits, disciplinary action, or even death.

OBJECTIVE:

Whether realized or not, law enforcement and other first responders serve the autism community on a daily basis and often in high-stress situations. A practical understanding of the disorder can mean the difference between safety and harm. This course is designed to first help officers and first responders recognize when a citizen may be on the autism spectrum. The training then provides "scenario-based" instruction to assist officers with practical application in the field through a balance of factual information, interaction tips, and de-escalation strategies.

Many individuals on the spectrum also suffer from one, or more, mental health issues. According to recent research, young people with autism who have serious psychiatric problems stand a ninefold greater chance of having an encounter with the police than do others on the spectrum. Moments of crisis can dramatically affect a person's mental health and how they are able to comprehend what is happening to them and around them.

Further:

- By age 21, 1 in 5 youth with autism have been stopped and questioned by police and nearly 5% had been arrested. ([Tint et al., 2017](#))
- 70% of kids with ASD have at least one mental health disorder; 41%-50% have two or more. ([Behavioral Health, 2021](#))
- Individuals on the spectrum with police involvement are more likely to be older, have a history of aggression, live outside the family home, and have parents with higher rates of caregiver strain and financial difficulty. ([Tint et al., 2017](#))

Participants leave their sessions with a comprehensive understanding for why autism training is important and how it will play into their daily work experience.

COURSE OUTLINE:

- What is autism spectrum disorder?
- Recognizing autism spectrum disorder in everyday contacts
- Issues faced by those on the spectrum and the people that care for them

- Wandering and the dangers involved
- Ways to interact with individuals on the spectrum in crisis
- De-escalation strategies
- Interviewing individuals on the spectrum
- Community Policing opportunities and resources
- A panel of individuals whose lives have been directly affected by autism

RECOMMENDATIONS:

In January of 2017, The U.S. Department of Justice encouraged law enforcement (and all criminal justice entities for that matter) to comply more with the Americans with Disabilities Act, specifically Title II, 42USC 12131-12134. Title II requires that individuals with disabilities are given equal treatment in the criminal justice system. <https://www.ada.gov/cjta.html>

The [CDC](#) reports that approximately 1 in 36 individuals has autism. With this prevalence, it is critical for all first responders to learn best practices for responding to emergency situations involving a person with autism. With this training we hope to provide officers and first responders with a general understanding of this complex disorder and how to be respond and interact with citizens on the autism spectrum.

COURSE INFORMATION:

The course is an 8-hour day. It is accredited through CLEET for 8 hours of continuing education with 2 of those hours being mental health hours. It is free to attend and host the course. Multiple days can be scheduled as well. If there is a need for overnight staying, we request compensation for a room.

Attendance size is not limited; however, we do highly recommend class participation. The only requirements needed are a projector and audio (can provide our own if needed).

INFORMATION ABOUT CORY SUTTON:

Cory retired from law enforcement after serving a total of 24 years. Cory spent 16 years with The University of Oklahoma police department and 8 years with the Norman police department. He has twin daughters with a developmental disability, Phelan-McDermid Syndrome. Cory has been teaching this course to first responders across the state of Oklahoma since 2011. Cory now works for the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services as a Law Enforcement Trainer.

QUESTIONS OR SCHEDULING:

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This class has been accredited by the Council on Law Enforcement Education and Training for 8 hours of mandatory continuing education with 2 of those also counting for mental health hours. Regarding any law enforcement concepts, practices, methods, techniques, products, or devices, as might be taught, promoted, or otherwise espoused in outside schools or seminars, there is no intent, expressed or implied, that 'accreditation' indicates or in any way conveys 'CLEET approval' of such concepts, practices, methods, techniques, products, or devices, unless such approval is explicitly stated by CLEET.