Children with Developmental Disabilities: A Training for First Responders

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This training will address

- An overview of developmental disabilities
- Common characteristics of people who have Intellectual Disability and Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Frequency rates in which people with disabilities interface with first responders
- Issues that first responders face when they serve people with developmental disabilities
- Tools and resources for first responders

What is a Developmental Disability?

- A developmental disability is a disability which:
  - Occurs before the age of 18
  - Is expected to continue indefinitely
  - Constitutes a substantial disability
What is a Developmental Disability?

- Developmental Disability is an umbrella term that covers
  - Intellectual Disability
  - Autism Spectrum Disorder
  - Epilepsy
  - Cerebral Palsy
  - Conditions closely related to Intellectual Disability

Intellectual Disability (ID)

- Sub-average general intellectual functioning
- An IQ score of 70 or below
- Significant limitations in adaptive functioning
- Onset before the age of 18

Distribution of IQ scores

IQ Score

- 55
- 70
- 85
- 100
- 115
- 130
- 145
Intellectual Disability (ID)

- 1-3% of the general population have ID
- An additional 1-2% have conditions similar to ID
  - IQ scores in the 70s, low adaptive functioning, immature social skills, serious learning problems
- 85% have a mild form

Video example

People with ID

- People with moderate and/or severe ID are more likely to be living in the community
- Developmental Centers are closing
- People with ID have a right to be in community and to live as independently as possible
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dJuFf_NolHg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dJuFf_NolHg)
Intellectual Disability (ID)

- People with ID are grossly overrepresented as victims of crime
- Some evidence suggests that people with ID are more likely to commit petty crimes and more serious crimes than the general population
- They are overrepresented in jails and prisons

National Crime Victimization Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Violent crime rate per 1,000 People with disabilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>32.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sexual abuse and people with ID

- Children with ID are 4 times more likely to have records of sexual abuse than their non-disabled peers (Sullivan & Knutsen, 2000)
- Children with behavior problems have an even higher risk (Shakeshaft, 2004)

People with ID maintain a high vulnerability to sexual abuse throughout their adulthood.

- Adults with ID continue to be targeted for sexual abuse at rates similar to those of children with ID
- 64% of adult females and 50% of adult males with ID report being targets of sexual exploitation (Zemp, 2002)

People with ID as perpetrators of crime

- Researchers began observing the relationship between intelligence and incarceration in the 1920s.
- 50% of inmates had subnormal intelligence (IQ score below 90)
- 30% had IQ scores of 75 or below

- The relationship between subnormal intelligence and incarceration appears to be even stronger for juvenile offenders. 78% of juvenile offenders have subnormal intelligence.
- 20-25% have IQ scores below 75
People with ID as perpetrators of crime

- Some researchers argue that the relationship between intelligence and crime is not strong. They report that people with ID have risk factors.
- People with ID are 2 to 3 times more likely than the general population to have a psychiatric or behavioral disorder.
- 30-40% of people with ID are also diagnosed with psychiatric disorders (Weiss, 1997).
- People with ID are at very high risk of living at or below the poverty line.
- 38% of people with disabilities live below the poverty line.
- People with ID are not likely to have paid legal representation.
- They are not likely to do well when questioned by police.
- Immediately admit what they have done.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

- ASD is a complex disorder of brain development that is characterized by difficulties in social-communication, verbal and non-verbal communication, and repetitive behaviors.
- 1 in 68 newborns will be identified with ASD (1-2% of population).
- The rate of ASD appears to be increasing.
- People with ASD are much more likely to be diagnosed with other disabilities and psychiatric disorders than the general population.
- More and more people with ASD have a mild form and participate in the community in a typical way (work, live independently, etc.).
People with ASD as victims of crime

- National Crime Victimization Survey

- [Link 1](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IAHswX-vvBw) - Body movement

- [Link 2](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C08vyrSt0Q) - Finger movement
People with ASD as perpetrators of crime

- Not very much research on criminal behavior and ASD
- Preliminary research suggests that adults with ASD are less likely to engage in law breaking behavior
- Youth with ASD may be more likely to engage in crimes against persons and less likely to engage in crimes against property
  - More likely to be diverted into pre-trial interventions
  - Less likely to be prosecuted

People with ASD and the need for first responders

- People with ASD may engage in behaviors that lead to the involvement of police
  - Yelling, disruptive behavior, or poor emotional control
  - More likely to have medical conditions that require emergency responses (30% of people with ASD will have a seizure)
  - May use body movements that alarms other people
  - Language or repetitive words that alarms other people
Interviewing People with ID/ASD

Minimal Facts Interview
- Assess child safety and welfare
- Conduct complete detailed interview with reporting party
- Determine jurisdiction and basic elements of crime
- Make limited contact with child

First Responder Mindset
- Responder’s attitude
- Nonverbal victims
- Family member information
- Communication difficulties
- Hidden disabilities
Initial Contact

- How long does responder spend with adults before addressing victim directly?
- Facial expression
- Tone of voice, choice of words and conversation style
- Body language
- Physical position
- Eye contact

Distractions

- Be aware that your police equipment and uniform can be a big distraction
- Attempt to remove any additional distractions such as loud radio or television
- Locate quietest space available
  - Gather information from reporting party and/or parents to determine additional space needs

Recording

- Audio record interview
- Explain to victim need for recording and ask permission
- If denied note on report but don’t push to record
- Remember minimal facts interview
During the interview

- Do not talk down to child
- Make introductions and explain process
- Spend extra time establishing rapport
- Ask one question at a time and assess ability to respond to abstract questions
- Adapt language and be patient
- Notice changes in behavior and signs of fatigue
- Proceed slowly
- Do not make assumptions

- Provide overview of interview structure
- Explain rules and process
- Allow space for agitation within limits
- Allow space for withdrawal
- Take breaks or temporarily engage in another activity
- Acknowledge difficulty in discussing topic

Reassure victim

- Responder is there to help
- The victim is not in trouble
- The perpetrator is the responsible party
- Explain further process for investigation
Language Considerations

- People with ID and ASD have communication differences
- Special considerations are necessary during the interview
- Minimize distractions in interview room
- Shorter sentences
- Allow for long silences
- Pay attention to eye contact and body language
- Try to periodically re-engage if child understands questions
- Acknowledge communication challenges
- Listen to child’s use of language/word selection
- Repeat back what child tells you
- Clarify pronouns and use identifiers

ASD communication difficulties

- Very limited vocabulary or vocabulary that does not fit the conversation
- Exaggerated focus on one topic of interest
- Inability to read body language/facial expressions
- Literal interpretations
- Avoidance of eye contact, unusual speech and or flat intonation are common

Touch

- Be mindful that some people with disabilities may have inappropriate boundaries with touch
  - May not want to be touched at all
  - May want to be touched a lot
- Avoid touching victim
- Maintain appropriate boundaries
- Determine from reporting party/parent if a handshake is appropriate
Eye contact

- Allow victims to initiate eye contact
- Be aware that training regarding normal eye contact between individuals does not apply
- Eye Contact for victims with certain types of disabilities can be painful and unpleasant
- Do not presume lack of eye contact as suspicious or untruthful

Voice

- Speak in a normal regular voice
- Use appropriate tone and volume

A successful interaction

- Rapport development
- Communication strategies
- Open-ended questions
- Closure
CASE 1

CASE 2

Resources
- People First
  - https://www.peoplefirstca.org/
- Autism Speaks
  - https://www.autismspeaks.org/
- National Crime Victimization Survey
  - https://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=dcdetail&iid=345