


<b>POLICY 508.1</b>	<b>AUTISM AND AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER</b>	
	New: <b>03/2020</b>	RELATED POLICIES:
	CFA STANDARDS: 15.18M	REVIEWED:

**A. POLICY**

The Fort Lauderdale Police Department recognizes people with Autism Spectrum Disorder may have communication limitations. This policy addresses the department’s recognition of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), compliance with training standards, Florida law pertaining to interactions with ASD individuals, and establishes responsibilities and procedures for interviewing victims, suspects, or defendants diagnosed with autism or an autism spectrum disorder.

**B. DEFINITIONS**

Autism – A pervasive, neurologically based developmental disability of extended duration, which causes severe learning, communication, and behavior disorders with age of onset during infancy or childhood. Individuals with autism exhibit impairment in reciprocal social interaction, impairment in verbal and nonverbal communication and imaginative ability and a markedly restricted repertoire of activities and interests.

Autism Spectrum Disorder – The term autism spectrum disorder incorporates several previously separate diagnoses including Autistic Disorder, Asperger’s Disorder, Pervasive Developmental Disorder/Not Otherwise specified (POD-NOS), and Childhood Disintegrative Disorder.

Developmental Disability – A disorder or syndrome that is attributable to intellectual disability, cerebral palsy, autism, spina bifida, or prader-willi syndrome; that manifests before the age of 18; and that constitutes a substantial handicap that can reasonably be expected to continue indefinitely.

Qualified Professional – A professional is deemed qualified if the professional has experience treating, teaching, or assisting patients or clients that have been diagnosed with autism, an autism spectrum disorder, a related developmental disability, or is certified in special education with a concentrated focus on persons with autism or autism spectrum disorder. For example: Psychologist, Psychiatrist, Mental Health Counselor, Special Education Instructor, Clinical Social Worker, etc.

FPLD Cares – An outreach effort designed to allow families living with Autistic loved ones an opportunity to provide helpful information on how to identify and interact with their Autistic loved ones in an effort to foster positive communication.

### **C. SCOPE AND APPLICABILITY**

The Center for Disease Control estimates that 1 in 68 children have been identified with autism spectrum disorder, which they define as a developmental disability that can cause significant social, communication, and behavioral challenges. While these individuals' range of abilities can vary from gifted to severely challenged, they may communicate, interact, behave, and learn differently. Individuals with Autism are seven times more likely to have an encounter with law enforcement. Therefore, it is highly likely that Department members, in the course of the performance of their duties, may encounter individuals with autism spectrum disorder.

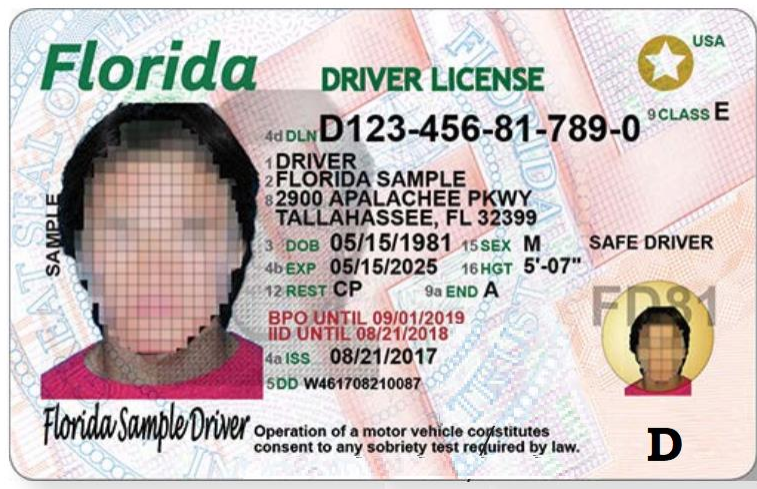
### **D. PROCEDURES**

#### **1. Identification of Individuals with Autism/Autism Spectrum Disorder**

a. Employees are not expected to diagnose disabilities; however, they should be aware of common indicators of individuals that are on the autism spectrum. Individuals with ASD may exhibit a variety of behaviors and may communicate, interact, and behave in different ways. Common indicators of an individual with ASD include, but are not limited to:

- (1). Having an impaired sense of danger
- (2). Wandering towards bodies of water, traffic, and other dangers
- (3). Being overwhelmed by police presence
- (4). Reacting to the presence of police with fight or flight reactions
- (5). Being non-responsive to verbal commands and interaction
- (6). Having delayed speech and language skills
- (7). Avoiding eye contact
- (8). Engaging in repetitive behavior (e.g. rocking, spinning, and hand flapping)
- (9). Having sensory perception issues
- (10). Having epilepsy or a seizure disorder

b. Employees should be aware that a person with a developmental disability may be in possession of a Florida identification card or driver's license exhibiting a capital "D", indicating they have been diagnosed with such disability. The absence of the "D" is not an indication the person is not diagnosed with a disability, as it may not be listed in their profile.



2. **Interaction with Autism/Autism Spectrum Disorder**

Some people with ASD may become easily upset and may engage in self-destructive behaviors or become aggressive. Fear, including fear of law enforcement, frustration, and minor changes in their daily routines and surroundings may trigger such behavior. The mere presence of an officer can be a source of stress. When interacting with individuals with ASD it is suggested to:

- a. Speak calmly.
- b. Use direct, simple language and avoid slang.
- c. Repeat short, direct phrases in a calm voice.
- d. Allow for delayed responses (10-15 seconds) to your questions or commands.
- e. Use non-threatening body language.
- f. Keep hands at sides, when possible.
- g. Maintain a safe distance, providing the person with a zone of comfort that will also serve as a buffer for officer safety.
- h. Consider use of pictures, written phrases/commands, sign language, or computer images.
- i. Eliminate, to the degree possible, loud sounds, bright lights, and other sources of over-stimulation by turning off sirens and flashers, asking others to move away, or, if possible, moving the person to more quiet surroundings.
- j. Keep canines in the police vehicle and preferably away from the area, and ensure that other dogs are removed. However, be aware that people who have a service animal may become highly distraught if that animal is removed from them.

- k. Look for medical identification tags on wrists, neck, shoes, belt, or other apparel. Some persons, both verbal and non-verbal, carry wallet cards noting that they have an Intellectual Developmental Disability (I/DD) and that provide a contact name and telephone number of a family member, location where they live, or other contact information.
- l. Call the contact person or caregiver, when such information is available, or a disability advocacy organization for specific advice on calming the person.
- m. Be prepared for a potentially long encounter, as dealings with such individuals should not be rushed unless there is an emergency situation.
- n. Be attentive to sensory impairments. People with I/DDs often have impairments that make it difficult for them to process incoming sensory information properly. Should an officer identify a sensory impairment, he or she should take the following precautions to avoid exacerbating the situation:
  - (1). Do not touch the person. Unless the person is in an emergency situation, e.g., has been seriously injured, or is in imminent danger, or the individual is going to be taken into police custody.
  - (2). The officer should speak with the person quietly and in a nonthreatening manner to gain compliance.
  - (3). Use soft gestures and avoid abrupt movements or actions.
  - (4). Do not interpret odd behavior as belligerent. In a tense or even unfamiliar situation, these persons will tend to shut down and close off unwelcome stimuli, e.g., cover ears or eyes, lie down, shake or rock, repeat questions, sing, hum, make noises, or repeat information in a robotic way. This behavior is a protective mechanism for dealing with troubling or frightening situations. Do not stop the person from repetitive behavior unless it is harmful to him or her or others. Officers should not interpret the person's failure to respond to orders or questions as a lack of cooperation or a reason for increased force.
- o. If the individual is holding and appears to be fascinated with an inanimate object, consider allowing subject to hold the item for the calming effect (if officer safety is not jeopardized by doing so).
- p. Be aware of different forms of communication. Some people with an I/DD carry a book of universal communication icons. Pointing to one or more of these icons will allow these persons to communicate. Those with communication difficulties may also demonstrate limited speaking capabilities such as incorrectly using words like "You" when they mean "I."

- q. Do not get frustrated or angry at antisocial behaviors and exercise patience.
- r. Evaluate for injury: person may not ask for help or show any indications of pain, even though injury seems apparent. Be aware that the person may be having a seizure.

3. **Interviews of Individuals with Autism/Autism Spectrum Disorder**

When interviewing person(s) who clearly exhibit ASD behavior, the interviewer should make an effort to contact the individual's loved one or caretaker. The loved one or caretaker should be afforded the opportunity to have a qualified professional at their expense and of their choosing, attend the interview of the person diagnosed with ASD. When the individual, their loved one, or caretaker requests a professional be present at all interviews, the interviewing officer or designee shall take the following steps:

- 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, upon conviction of the offense in which the individual 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, inform them to contact the professional directly. If they prefer, you may obtain the professional's contact information and contact them for assistance.
- c. If the individual making the request does not have a specific professional they would like to request, the interviewing officer or designee shall refer the person seeking assistance to one of these supporting organizations.
  - (1). Autism Speaks 1-888-288-4762 English/1-888-772-9050
  - (2). UM-NSU CARD <http://www.umcard.org/home>
  - (3). UCF CARD at 1-800-9-AUTISM
- d. The officer or detective conducting the interview will note the offer and attempts to have the qualified professional present, and if one is present, they will be listed in the report as well.

**E. TRAINING**

All affected members of the Fort Lauderdale Police Department will complete initial and periodic (every 3 years) training that will include:

- 1. Instructions on the recognition of the symptoms and characteristics of an individual on the autism disorder spectrum.

2. Appropriate responses to an individual exhibiting such symptoms and characteristics.
3. The requirements of interviewing victims, suspects or defendants with autism or an autism spectrum disorder.

**F. FLPD CARES OUTREACH PROGRAM (AUTISM AWARENESS PROGRAM)**

This program offers families the option of providing critical information regarding their loved ones via the Department website (Flpd.org) under the “Community” tab. Officers and civilian staff should be aware of the FLPD Cares outreach program and how to utilize it.

After selecting FLPD Cares, a fillable form offers the opportunity to provide identifying information about the person living with Autism. A recent photograph can be uploaded and information regarding triggers to avoid and things the person living with Autism enjoys and feels safe with. For example if the Autistic person fears loud voices, officers can avoid loud verbal commands in favor of a different approach.

Once the form is completed, the information is routed to the Desk Sergeant who uploads the data into the Records Management System (RMS). This data is then available via CAD or RMS search. Regional Dispatch will be requested to create a “Special Needs Medical File” for the address. Dispatchers should provide this information to responding officers, detectives, and PSAs to ensure an appropriate approach.

Once data is uploaded to RMS, the Desk Sergeant provides a packet to the family containing a window decal and ID card for the affected individual. The decal and ID card bear the FLPD Cares logo. The logo includes the Autism puzzle design. Staff should look for this logo as an indicator they may be dealing with a person living with Autism.

**G. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

The Florida Department of Law Enforcement offers additional online training at <https://www.fdle.state.fl.us/FCJEL/Online-Training/Autism-Interviews>.