

Autism

- **Approach** • **Understand**
- **Talk** • **Instructions**
- **Seek** • **Maintain**

Approach the person in a quiet, non-threatening manner. Because persons with autism may be hypersensitive to stimuli, officers should attempt to avoid quick motions and gestures that a person with autism may perceive, even remotely, as threatening.

Understand that touching the person with autism may cause a protective “fight or flight” reaction. Officers should never touch a person with autism on the shoulders or near the face. Autistic hypersensitivity includes being touched and even extends to invasions of personal space.

Talk to the person in a moderate and calm voice. Although officers may have to repeat their directions or questions several times, they should be patient and wait for answers. Speaking loudly will not help and may even be viewed as threatening.

Instructions should be simple and direct with no use of slang. An individual with autism will take an officer’s statements literally. “Do you think that’s cool?” or “Up against the wall!” will probably cause confusion resulting in an inappropriate or unexpected response. Officers should use specific commands such as, “stand up” or “go to the car, now” to reduce the chance of confusion.

See all indicators to evaluate the situation as it unfolds. The more information you have about this individual, the better things will go.

Maintain a safe distance until any inappropriate behaviors lessen, but remain alert to the possibility of outbursts or impulsive acts.