

First Responders: Autism Awareness

TRAINING SUMMARY:

“Autism Awareness” has become an increasingly important topic as the numbers of people with this diagnosis continue to grow. First Responders in particular recognize the need to hone their knowledge about the autism spectrum so that they can react swiftly, safely, and appropriately to a person who has – or whom they suspect of having – autism. Due to their difficulties in processing the hidden cues in social interactions, the actions and intentions of people with autism may be misunderstood or exploited by others, resulting in calls for police intervention. Police may also become involved when people with autism wander off to do some exploring, only to become lost and unable to contact their caregivers. Medical, fire, and other safety emergencies may be complicated by difficulties in communicating with people on the spectrum, as well as by the sensory sensitivities of autism, which may result in overwhelming anxiety and panicked reactions. Yet people with autism are intelligent, sociable, and willing to cooperate with respectful responders if they receive the right support. By paying attention to the communicative, social, and sensory needs of the person with autism, as well as to the effects that their own presence and actions may create, a First Responder can help to ensure a safe, positive outcome.

TRAINING GOAL:

The goal of this training is for First Responders (police, fire, and ambulance personnel) to develop a working understanding of the autism spectrum, the ability to identify a person who may be on the spectrum, a “tool kit” of simple methods for calming and communicating with a child or adult who has autism, and a sensitive and empathetic approach that will guide them in making good choices and achieving the best possible outcomes.

TRAINING OBJECTIVES:

The objectives of the training are for the participants to:

1. Explore what an autism diagnosis does and does not mean, and recognize the signs that a person may be on the autism spectrum;
2. Acquire a basic awareness of the communicative, social, and sensory needs of people with autism, and how they may respond to anxiety and stress;
3. Understand how to approach and interact with individuals with autism, especially under difficult circumstances.

METHODS TO ACHIEVE OBJECTIVES:

This training also can be delivered in person in a traditional training or classroom setting incorporating lecture, videos, discussion, and interactive group exercises (2-3 hours).