



## Responding to Individuals with Autism

When interacting with an individual who you suspect may have autism:

- Maintain a calm and reassuring tone of voice with the individual.
- Talk in short, direct phrases such as, “Stand up now. Go to the car.”
- Have only one person at a time speak to the individual.
- Allow for delayed responses to questions and or directions/commands.
- Ignore unusual or disrespectful language from the person.
- If the individual’s aggressive or self-injurious behavior escalates, maintain a safe distance until the behaviors lessen.
- Due to tactile sensitivity, individuals with autism may attempt to pull out IVs and remove bandages. Monitor closely.
- Gently examine non-speaking individuals for the presence of medic-alert tags or other personal identification.

### If possible:

- Avoid touching the person with autism.
- Use pictures, gestures, or sign language to communicate.
- Turn off sirens and flashing lights, if possible.
- Do not interrupt repetitive behaviors, such as hand-flapping or pacing, unless person is in immediate danger. These behaviors may calm the individual during a stressful time.
- Move the individual to a quieter environment.

- Allow a familiar adult to ride with the person with autism during transport.
- Communicate with the receiving hospital before arrival to request a quiet, isolated room for the patient with autism.
- Alert ER personnel to prepare a triage for an individual with autism, even if the injury is relatively mild. This may prevent serious behavioral difficulties and disruption to the emergency room.

### Important Safety Facts

- Individuals with autism often have a high tolerance for pain. They may not tell you that they are injured. They may also have unusual responses to pain, such as laughing.
- Individuals with autism have a higher rate of epilepsy than the general population.
- Due to underdeveloped trunk muscles, individuals with autism are at especially HIGH RISK for positional asphyxia during emergency restraint.
- Many children and adults with autism may bolt during or after treatment. EMS personnel should monitor closely.
- Some individuals with autism take medication.

### For more information:

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This information was adapted from materials developed by the Autism Society of America, Alaska Autism Resource Center and the Indiana Resource Center for Autism.



# Autism Spectrum Disorders

## Tips for EMS Personnel



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## What is Autism?

Autism is a complex neurobiological condition that interferes with an individual's ability to communicate and interact with other people. Some individuals with autism also exhibit unusual behaviors (such as rocking, spinning, or hand-flapping) especially when they are in unfamiliar or stressful situations.

## Recognizing Autism

Individuals with autism cannot be identified by their physical appearance. They are usually identified by their behavior. When in an unfamiliar or stressful situation, individuals with autism may:

- Run away when approached or given commands.
- Respond negatively to touch or requests for eye contact.
- Appear belligerent or rude.
- Repeat exactly what the EMS personnel says.
- Have difficulty judging personal space (stand too close or far away).
- Talk about seemingly unrelated topics such as favorite sports teams or computer games.
- Scream or vocalize loudly, especially if touched.
- Respond negatively to loud sounds (sirens) and flashing lights.
- Fight a rescuer due to fear.
- Engage in repetitive movements, such as hand-flapping or self-hitting.

# TIPS FOR EMS PERSONNEL

## Autism Facts

According to the Centers for Disease Control, one in 59 children are diagnosed with autism each year.

There are adults and children with autism living throughout urban and rural Kentucky—65,000 throughout the state.

Some individuals with autism are highly intelligent, speak very well, and live independent lives. These individuals may drive cars, have jobs, own their own homes, etc.

Fifty percent of individuals with autism are nonverbal throughout their lifetime.

Autism occurs five times more frequently in males than in females.

Individuals with autism may have extreme reactions to common objects or events.

Autism may also be called, "autism spectrum disorder", "PDD", "PDD-NOS", or "Asperger's Syndrome."

## When May EMS personnel encounter an Individual with Autism?

The most common times EMS personnel may interact with an individual with autism are:

1. The child or adult with autism is in need of emergency medical care.
2. The child or adult is involved in a motor vehicle or other accident, or a fire to which EMS personnel respond.
3. The child or adult is exhibiting dangerously aggressive behavior at home, in school, or in a community setting.



*When in an unfamiliar or stressful situation, individuals with autism may respond negatively to loud sounds (sirens) and flashing lights.*

