

## The Kentucky Legal System and Autism

A survey of individuals with ASD and their families indicated that 35% of individuals with autism had been the victim of a crime and that 23% have had interactions with first responders due to wandering or eloping (Autism Society, 2007).

With deficits in social interactions and communication, an adult with ASD may inadvertently become the perpetrator of sexual harassment or stalking, or being talked into participating in illegal activities. Although an adult with ASD may have an average to higher than average IQ, he or she can still have challenges in social interaction and communication that limit the understanding of a situation. In other situations, an adult with ASD may react negatively to interactions in the community and with law enforcement. If the person with ASD was unable to communicate, they could be mistaken for being aggressive or having a mental illness.

People with ASD may be involved with the legal system several different ways. An adult with ASD may be involved with the criminal justice system as the victim of a crime or may participate as perpetrators of a crime. They may navigate the system to receive services or funding through the mental health system, or to determine competence. Regardless of how they interact with the system, deficits in social interactions and communication may lead to misunderstandings, misdiagnosis, or a negative outcome.

## Recommendations

- Provide resources and training to law enforcement and medical personnel to identify and take appropriate actions with adults with ASD.
- Identify experts who can help guide adults with ASD through the legal system when necessary.
- Work with the legal system to grant accommodations and/or make the legal system easier to navigate for people with ASD and other developmental disabilities
- Build community awareness

## Resources

Autism Society of America <a href="www.autism-society.org/safeandsound">www.autism-society.org/safeandsound</a>
L.E.A.N. On Us (Law Enforcement Awareness Network) <a href="www.leanonus.org">www.leanonus.org</a>
National Organization for Victim Assistance (NOVA) 1.800.879.6682
Kentucky Protection and Advocacy <a href="www.kypa.net">www.kypa.net</a>