

# Improving police capability to engage effectively with people who have autism

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# Incident involving police and young man with autism

- Circumstances
- Risks
- Options
- Consequences

# Possible issues arising from a person with autism encountering the police

- Making a call to the police may be difficult
- May not recognise police / emergency vehicles
- OR
- May be confusion with uniforms / plain clothes
- Behaviour may be misconstrued as offending
- May not respond to questions / instructions
- May not understand implications of their actions
- May react to stressful situation with extreme anxiety

# Young man with autism involved in anti-social behaviour

- Man with learning disabilities targeted by young teenagers.
- Causing nuisance and distress
- Officers attended – young man admitted his involvement
- Officers became aware he had ASD
- Consulted autism support worker
- Assistance given with wording of ABC
- Appropriate to his level of understanding
- No longer involved in this behaviour

## Acceptable Behaviour Contract

**THIS CONTRACT is made on 01/05/2010 between Andrew TAYLOR, North Yorkshire Police, Neighbourhood Policing Team and the Autism Support Network agrees the following in respect of future conduct.**

- 1. To not act in a manner that is likely to cause distress or upset any person.**
- 2. To not encourage any other persons to carry out such actions as stated above.**

**REVIEW PERIOD 6 months**

### **DECLARATION**

**I confirm that I understand the meaning of this contract and that the consequences of breaches of the contract have been explained to me**

## ■ Advice from Autism support;

To not act in a manner that is likely to cause distress or upset any person.

Andrew has difficulty understanding the thoughts and feelings of others so the wording here needs to reflect this, such as... *To remember that people must not be frightened or upset by Oliver's behaviour and that he must behave in a reasonable manner when out with his friends.* This contract must reflect Andrew's need to have its terms and expectations explained to him in a manner which he can understand and which takes account of his diagnosed condition.

To not encourage any other persons to carry out such actions as stated above.

This is too vague for Andrew I would actually state where he may not go and include the street or address of the victim. He may need to be shown and given a map and have an area where he may not go outlined on that map.

## Acceptable Behaviour Contract

THIS CONTRACT is made on 01/05/2010 between Andrew TAYLOR, North Yorkshire Police, Neighbourhood Policing Team and the **Autism Support Network** agrees the following in respect of future conduct.

1. My behaviour has upset people before in the past, I will not act like this again towards anyone.
2. I will not do anything to harass or alarm people in their homes.
3. I will not do anything to bully or frighten children or other people.
4. I will not go near 12 Fulford Road, York, unless accompanied by a Parent or Guardian.

REVIEW PERIOD 3 months

# Understanding the ambiguous nature of the condition.

Knowing what to expect and what not.

All people with autism experience difficulties with

- Social interaction
  - Social communication
  - Social imagination
- 
- All are individuals with particular ways of relating to others
  - Autism affects individuals to varying degrees

- May display unusual behaviour
- In general autism is a hidden disability
- May have excellent use of spoken language
- May have no language
- Eye contact may be fleeting or avoided
- May be prolonged or intrusive
- Some people may be stubborn or belligerent
- Others may be over compliant
- May experience over sensitivity
- May be under sensitive to the same

- If the person you have encountered is displaying unusual behaviour –
- Consider whether that person is on the autism spectrum

# Establishing effective communication

- Any person with ASD who becomes involved in CJS is likely to experience particularly high levels of anxiety;
- Circumstances leading to involvement
  - Change of routine
  - Circumstances scrutinised
  - Actions questioned

# Following points may assist in communication

- Aim to keep situation calm
- Avoid sirens / lights
- Try to avoid touching person
- Simple language / necessary words
- Talk calmly / natural voice
- Avoid facial expression
  
- **SEEK ADVICE & PREPARE**

# Seek advice & prepare

- Someone who knows person well
- Parents / carers / teachers
- Social workers / autism support
  
- Advice re;
  - Medical problems
  - Behaviour
  - Level of communication
  - Likely responses to stressful situation
  - Time and place

- Aim to establish level of familiarity / relax person
- Meet at familiar place
- Prepare;
- Explain situation
- Simple / concise language
- Use name at start of sentence
- Ensure questions are direct / clear / focused
- Allow time for responses
- Consider visual information
- Avoid sarcasm / irony / metaphors

# Example

- Boy aged 12 with ASD
- Victim of assault
- Seek advice
- Prepare
- Result ; full account in ABE
- Offender traced and reprimanded

# How the police can engage with young people with autism

- We are not used to dealing with people with ASD
- May take us out of our comfort zone
- In trying to engage;
  - Need to overcome fears /misapprehensions
  - Provides reassurance to families / carers
- Allows for interaction in non stressful situation
- Can develop positive feelings towards police
- Sends out positive message to public

- Local policing team
- Forged links with playscheme for young people with disabilities / ASD
- Helping with improving the environment
- Have become involved in fundraising
- Spending time with young people
- Links with local schools / pupils with ASD
- Links with ASD support groups

# Autism alert

- In association with NAS, since 2007 many police forces have developed an 'autism alert' card.
- August 2008 launched in NYP.
- Approx 50% forces in UK including PSNI / Scotland now have a programme.
- Aim of the card is to enable a person with ASD to bring this to the attention of the police when required
- To alert the police that the person has a condition which may require special attention

- People who are more likely to benefit from the card are those at more able end of spectrum, high functioning autism or Aspergers syndrome due to greater independence.
- The card does not preclude someone with ASD who has committed an offence from being dealt with according to the law.
- In addition to alert card programme, a training package was developed to assist the police to recognise the condition at an early stage
- Some knowledge of ASD could assist officers in dealing more appropriately with a situation which has the potential to escalate.

# Autism Alert DVD

- Shown by kind permission of Strathclyde Police

Autism can be a hidden disability but with knowledge and understanding, we can assist the people it affects, ensuring that they play a full role in society and are afforded the rights and protection they need.