

# Useful Tips for First Responders Aiding with People with Disabilities During COVID-19

- Many of us, including people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) are feeling anxiety in this time.
  - For people with disabilities, this anxiety is heightened by underlying health conditions that might make them more vulnerable to the spread of COVID-19 and due to the widespread media coverage over the possible rationing of medical care to persons with disabilities.
  - For some with I/DD, interaction with authority figures can provide an added level of stress, even under normal circumstances.
  - This guide is meant to provide some basic help for assisting persons with I/DD during this time. Please also refer to the other document, created by The Arc of Aurora, which explain some basic information about people with disabilities and the individuals that help to provide them care.
- 1) When possible, be friendly and congenial. Remember to begin with a greeting and kindness in order to establish trust.
  - 2) Be clear and concise. Give the person as much information as you can in a clear manner. We typically recommend that **written communication** be at a third grade reading level.
  - 3) Avoid the use of metaphors, abstract language, and idioms.
    - a. Especially for a person with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), the use of metaphor can be confusing. Speak clearly and keep in mind the following examples:
      - i. If you ask a person with ASD if they have a weapon, they might think of a knife in their place of residence and respond that they do have a weapon. Instead, ask, “Do you have a knife, a gun, or another weapon with you right now?”
      - ii. Metaphors and idioms are specific to regions and people. Avoid abstract reasoning that may lessen clarity.
      - iii. Remember that when people are in distress, they may be more prone to confusion and misunderstandings.
  - 4) Speak to the person you are assisting or apprehending with respect.
    - a. It’s important to speak to a person with disabilities in a respectful way. This establishes trust. Adults with disabilities are adults and deserve to be communicated with in such a manner.
  - 5) Many people with disabilities live with aging caregivers who may also be vulnerable to COVID-19 at this time. People with disabilities may be reticent to leave their family member. Remember that many of these family units have been together, in a very intimate environment, for many decades. When dealing with family members and people with disabilities, consider the increased level of fear that might come with separation.