



Forensic Interviewing for Individuals on the autism spectrum

It is important to recognize that individuals on the autism spectrum should be believed when they have reported being a victim of a crime. Individuals on the spectrum can be particularly susceptible to victimization due to challenges they may have across the below areas:



- **Difficulty with communication** (*if they cannot verbally communicate maybe they will not report the incident, or it may be more difficult for them to do so*)
- **Difficulty recognizing deception and understanding good touch/bad touch** (*may be more trusting and believe that what is happening to them is “ok”*)

Additionally, people on the spectrum may be seen as “unreliable” or not “believable.” This makes them further vulnerable to victimization as a perpetrator may think that they are more believable than someone with autism or an intellectual disability. Below are some tips to help forensic interviewers gather the information they need in a way that is most comfortable for individuals on the spectrum.

Understanding Autism

- **Do not dismiss non-verbal individuals as being unable to communicate. There are lots of different ways individuals may communicate.**

- Considerations:

- Do they understand you?
- Do they use a communication device?
- Do they use gestures?

- **Presume competence**
- **When possible, include someone who is familiar with the individual’s communication mode to help facilitate the interview**

Important Considerations

- **Determine how the individual communicates (*verbal/gestures/communication device*)**

- **If they use a communication device, make sure someone is present who knows how to use the communication device effectively**

- Use the individual's words (*especially if they use a communication device*)

- If the individual uses a communication device, make sure the words and language you use are included in the individual's vocabulary found on the device

- Build trust and rapport (*reduces anxiety and improves trust*)

- If you notice the individual is wearing a Rolling Stones t-shirt, ask what their favorite Rolling Stone song is

- Be concrete and literal with language and avoid pronouns, figures of speech/idioms, abstract language

- Avoid using abstract phrases and slang speech like "What's up?" instead be literal with your questions, "What are you doing?"
- Be careful of conversational punctuation ("Really?!", "You do?!") can be leading and suggestive which may cause them to change their answers

- Use visuals

Part 4: In the police station



- Take breaks

- Let the individual know that it is okay to ask for a break when they need one

- Timing of the interview is important

- The individual may do better in the mornings, afternoon, etc.
- Consider if medication is used at what time of day it's most effective

- Ensure the physical space is conducive to the individual/consider sensory needs and have sensory items available such as a stress ball, fidget toys



- Avoid infantilization

- Do not speak to a 30-year-old man in the voice you may use with someone younger regardless of ability or disability
- Multi-session interviews may be needed and should be close together as individuals with autism may take more time to process information and consequently, they may need more time to organize to process a response. Processing language and executive functioning (planning, sequencing) may be difficult for individuals with autism so an interview may need to take place over several days

- Use same interviewer each time

- The individual's tone may sound bossy, or they may be brutally honest

- Understand that individuals on the spectrum may struggle with expressive language so they may appear to be disrespectful due to their tone of voice or choice of words

- Building trust, getting used to the tone of someone's voice and their speech patterns may help individuals with autism feel safer and communicate more effectively

- Have one person communicate at a time if multiple interviewers

- Having too many voices and too much language coming at the individual may cause them to shut down

- Informed consent (*right to revoke consent at any time*)

- Make sure the individual with autism or the caretaker understands what consent means