



# Identifying Individuals with Autism in Emergency Settings

When you arrive at an emergency situation, you may have little information about the people involved, including any disabilities or diagnoses. Unlike physical disabilities, you can't tell a person has autism just by looking at them. This resource provides tips on identifying a person who may have autism.

## SIGNS OF AUTISM



### Repetitive Behaviors

- Flapping hands, flicking fingers, spinning, rocking, jumping
- Focuses on one topic/detail, primarily only talks about that topic
- Repeats words, phrases, or sounds. May repeat things said to them (echolalia)

### Mental Processes

- Poor impulse control (e.g., touching objects even after being told to stop)
- Unable to follow multi-step instructions
- Delayed responding to directions or statements

### Communication

- Failure to respond to questions or instruction
- Difficulty with eye contact
- Inability to communicate effectively, may have no spoken language
- Stiff body language
- Literal interpretation of questions/statements
- Flat tone of voice

### Sensory Behaviors

- Overly sensitive to sounds, lights, touch, smells, or other sensory input, (e.g., close their eyes, cover their ears)
- Doesn't appear to respond to sensory input, may appear deaf or hard of hearing
- May appear to not feel pain/discomfort



During fires, individuals with autism have been known to hide in closets or under beds to escape from the sound of fire alert systems. In emergency situations (e.g., car accidents), they may attempt to run away due to sensory overload.