

INTERVIEW STRATEGIES AND BEHAVIORS ASSOCIATED WITH ASD

INTERVIEW STRATEGIES – COMMAND PRESENCE

During an interview, remember your training for any individual in crisis:

- Maintain a composed presence.
- Speak clearly, and in a calm tone of voice.
- Do not require the person to make eye contact with you.
- Use direct phrases, avoid slang expressions.
- Be patient and allow extra time for responses.
- Verbalize your actions before initiating them.
- Model the behavior you wish for the person to follow.
- Give praise and encouragement when appropriate.
- Avoid quick movements with large or exaggerated hand or arm movements.
- Be alert for possible verbal or behavioral outbursts.

COMMON BEHAVIORS ASSOCIATED WITH ASD

Below are some possible behaviors people with ASD may exhibit.

DIFFICULTY FOLLOWING VERBAL COMMANDS AND INTERPRETING BODY LANGUAGE

- May not look at you directly, may turn away from you, or may not respond to any sort of interaction at all.
- May mirror your actions in an attempt to understand the interaction with you. This is not meant to be disrespectful; the person is looking to you to provide guidance on how to act.
- Be specific in what you want. Don't be forceful or rude, but use clear and concise language.

BECOME ARGUMENTATIVE, BELLIGERENT, OR MAY TRY TO STRIKE YOU

- May suddenly or aggressively move towards you in an expression of frustration. Follow agency policy on maintaining a reactionary distance for any interview.
- May try to harm themselves when agitated. May start to hit themselves, especially their head, bang their head against a wall or table, bite themselves, or scratch at any exposed skin.

DISPLAY SELF-STIMULATING BEHAVIORS WHEN AGITATED

- This can include things such as body rocking, pacing, spinning, muttering, or humming.
- These allow the person to calm down and focus on what is happening around them. Do not try to stop these behaviors unless the person is in immediate danger, because doing so may cause increased agitation or meltdown.

TOUCH MAY CAUSE A "FIGHT OR FLIGHT" REACTION

- Some have sensitive skin. A touch can feel like someone has hit or stabbed them.
- It's normal to want to show support or concern by touch, but it could have the opposite effect for these individuals.

MAY TRY TO RUN FROM YOU TO AVOID THE SITUATION

- It's difficult to judge whether the person is fleeing the scene or is just afraid. Evaluate the facts of the situation and use your knowledge and experience when making your decision on how to manage the situation.

INAPPROPRIATE OR UNUSUAL VERBALIZATIONS

- May laugh or say things at inappropriate times.
- May repeat every question you ask, or answer your questions with quotes from movies or television.
- May answer every question with "why" or "no."
- May even confess to every suggestion you make, because they believe this is what you want to hear.

SENSORY DYSFUNCTION

- Too many things happening at once can overwhelm them and cause a shutdown or a meltdown. The person may cover their head, eyes, or ears to block out light and sound.
- Try to reduce these distractions, especially in the field:
 - Turn off lights and sirens.
 - Lower your portable radio volume.
 - Turn off flashlights, if possible.
 - Disperse loud crowds.
 - Remove barking dogs.
 - Keep the person strategically isolated, such as in a car, on a porch, or away from the scene.
 - Ask the person if they need a parent or caregiver to provide assistance or comfort.
 - Provide a towel or blanket, so that the person can block out the light and sound.

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