



## Autism: What Crisis Responders Need to Know

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## Learning Objectives

At the conclusion of this session, participants will be able to:

- Accurately define “Autism Spectrum Disorders”
- Describe at least three unique contributing factors to potential crises that are specific to families of individuals with ASD
- Identify at least five common communication characteristics of individuals with ASD
- Name at least three myths associated with ASD
- Describe at least two strategies to facilitate your understanding and provision of meaningful support of the crisis at hand
- List at least two local preventative and/or crisis resources for families impacted by ASD

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## What is Autism?

“Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a developmental difference and/or disability that can cause significant social, communication and behavioral challenges. Individuals with ASD may communicate, interact, behave, and learn in ways that are different from others. The learning, thinking, and problem-solving abilities of individuals with ASD can range from gifted to severely challenged. Some individuals with ASD need a lot of support in their daily lives; others need less.”

\*<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/facts>, May 3, 2018

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## Brief Overview of Facts

- Neurobiological disorder
- Currently, has a prevalence rate of 1 in 59
- Is 3-4 times more prevalent in boys
- Crosses all racial, ethnic, & social boundaries
- No single-known cause
- Many genes lead to an increased risk
- Links to environmental and neurobiological triggers
- Some known differences in brain structure & connectivity
- Life-span challenges: these vary greatly from one individual to another

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## Common Myths

- Autism is a mental health disorder
- Autism is caused by vaccines
- Autism is caused by poor parenting
- Individuals with autism are violent
- Individuals with autism are unable or unwilling to form meaningful social relationships
- People with autism are cold and lack empathetic feelings
- People with autism can't stand to be touched
- People with autism have no sense of humor
- Autism can be cured

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## Autism & Crisis

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|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family characteristics</li> <li>• Nature/severity of presenting problems</li> <li>• Challenging behaviors</li> <li>• Inadequate Services</li> <li>• Financial depletion/strain</li> <li>• Service provider issues</li> <li>• Longevity of stressors</li> <li>• Lack of social support</li> <li>• Feelings of hopelessness/helplessness</li> <li>• Desire for validation</li> <li>• Concern for future</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeling Overwhelmed/Consumed</li> <li>• Frequency, constancy &amp; pervasiveness of crisis</li> <li>• Negative past experiences with Emergency Services</li> <li>• Ongoing fears of "imminent crisis"</li> <li>• Parental need for more information &amp; coping strategies during crisis</li> <li>• Need for more specialized training for crisis responders</li> </ul> |
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White, S.E., McMorris, C., Weiss, J.A. et al (2012)

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## Resources

- Local Psychological Service Providers (specific to ASD)

- Dr. Michelle McAtee:  
<http://www.michellemcatee.com/>  
(615) 544-5444
- Dr. Charles Ihrig:  
<http://athena-nashville.com/>  
(615) 320-1155

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## Additional Training Resource

- AutismSafety 101

- <http://autismsafety101.com/>
- [bart@autismsafety101.com](mailto:bart@autismsafety101.com)
- 305-733-0075
- The mission of *Autism Safety 101, Inc.* is to assist in making the lives of people affected by autism safer and provide public safety personnel with a greater understanding and awareness of the unique challenges and needs of people affected by autism.

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## Panel Discussion and Q&A



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