

## **Tips for Building Positive Interactions with Law Enforcement for Families and Individuals with Disabilities**

As an individual or a loved one of an individual with disabilities, it's essential to be prepared for interactions with law enforcement to ensure positive outcomes. Here are some tips and resources to help you navigate those interactions:

### **Know your rights**

Familiarize yourself with the rights and protections afforded to individuals with disabilities under federal and state laws, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Virginia Human Rights Act. Understand that individuals with disabilities have the right to reasonable accommodations, effective communication, and to be treated with dignity and respect during interactions with law enforcement.

### **Engage with law enforcement**

Consider reaching out to law enforcement agencies in your area to introduce them to yourself or your loved one. Provide information about your loved one's disability and any specific communication or sensory needs they may have. Offer to provide training materials or resources on disability awareness, and request that law enforcement officers participate in specialized training programs related to interacting with individuals with disabilities.

### **Create a communication plan**

Develop a communication plan for interactions with law enforcement that includes important information about your or your loved one's disability, communication style, and any sensory sensitivities. Consider utilizing an Autism identification tool, like a card that can be easily presented to law enforcement officers to help facilitate communication.

### **Use visual supports**

Visual supports, such as social stories, can be helpful in preparing your for interactions with law enforcement. Utilize visual supports that outline what to expect during an encounter with law enforcement, what actions to take, and what their rights are. Review these visual supports with your loved one regularly to reinforce the information.

### **Practice calming techniques**

Help your loved one develop calming techniques to manage stressful situations that may arise during interactions with law enforcement. Practice strategies such as deep breathing, counting to ten, or using a calm-down tool to help yourself or your loved one self-regulate and manage emotions.

### **Report any concerns or complaints**

If you encounter any issues or have concerns about an interaction with law enforcement, it's essential to report them. Contact your local authorities.

## Resources

disAbility Law Center of Virginia- <https://www.dlc.v.org/>

The ARC of Northern Virginia Resource Library-  
<https://thearcofnova.org/programs-services/library/#c-j-s>

Autism and Law Enforcement: Strategies for Safer Interactions-  
<https://researchautism.org/oaracle-newsletter/autism-and-law-enforcement-strategies-for-safer-interactions/>

Pathfinders for Autism Safety Resources-  
<https://pathfindersforautism.org/resources/safety/>