



**OKLAHOMA SHERIFFS'
ASSOCIATION**

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**OKLAHOMA
Mental Health &
Substance Abuse**

**HOSTED BY THE OKLAHOMA SHERIFFS' ASSOCIATION
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH & SUBSTANCE ABUSE SERVICES**

INTERACTIONS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

CLEET: 21-2264

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OBJECTIVE:

Whether realized or not, law enforcement and other first responders serve the autism community on a daily basis and often in high-stress situations. A practical understanding of the disorder can mean the difference between safety and harm. This course is designed to first help officers and first responders recognize when a citizen may be on the autism spectrum. The training then provides "scenario-based" instruction to assist officers with practical application in the field through a balance of factual information, interaction tips, and de-escalation strategies.

INTRODUCTION:

On a daily basis, law enforcement officers encounter a multitude of individuals in emergency situations. Police are trained to respond to a crisis situation with a certain protocol, but this protocol may not always be the best way to interact with people with autism. Because police are usually the first to respond to an emergency, it is critical that officers have a working knowledge of autism and the wide variety of behaviors people with autism can exhibit in emergency situations. Teaching first responders the signs of autism is an important first step toward preventing unfortunate situations that may result in injury, lawsuits, disciplinary action, or even death.

Many individuals on the spectrum also suffer from one, or more, mental health issues. According to recent research, young people with autism who have serious psychiatric problems stand a ninefold greater chance of having an encounter with the police than do others on the spectrum. Moments of crisis can dramatically affect a person's mental health and how they are able to comprehend what is happening to them and around them.

Further:

- **By age 21, 1 in 5 youth with autism have been stopped and questioned by police and nearly 5% had been arrested.**
- **As many as 85% of children with autism also have some form of comorbid psychiatric diagnosis, and 35% are taking at least 1 psychotropic medication as treatment.**
- **Individuals on the spectrum with police involvement are more likely to be older, have a history of aggression, live outside the family home, and have parents with higher rates of caregiver strain and financial difficulty.**

Participants leave their sessions with a comprehensive understanding for why autism training is important and how it will play into their daily work experience.