

## General Safety Information

### Cell phones

Cell phones are a widespread and essential tool used very frequently in everyday life for most people. We carry them in our pockets or purses and use them frequently. People with disabilities can use cellphones as a way to communicate and help keep themselves safe while out in the community. The tips below can help teach them to use a cellphone safely:

Research supports those that have significant language and social challenges can benefit from learning to answer cell phones and to follow directions delivered by phone in order to locate an adult and request assistance.

- Hannah Hoch, Ph.D., BCBA; Alpine Learning Group, Inc

- Be as discreet as possible when using your cell phone in public.
- Do not let anyone see you dial numbers.
- Do not use your cell phone to take photographs or capture videos of unsuspecting people, unless absolutely necessary.
- Speak in a soft voice if possible.
- Do not give out personal information over the cell phone.
- If you do not recognize the caller, hang up.
- Keep your cell phone in a secure pocket, buttoned or zipped if possible.
- Ensure important numbers are downloaded or stored for quick dial.
- Download photographs for individuals in the address book for quick identity.
- Keep your cell phone charged at all times.
- If cell phone signal is lost, attempt to reposition yourself to gain maximum coverage.
- Check your cell phone periodically to protect against a “pocket dial”.
- Use text in lieu of cell call if possible.
- DO NOT TEXT & DRIVE.
- Have an I.C.E. (In Case of Emergency) entry in cell phone, and also, use a bit of punctuation before it (\_I.C.E. or +I.C.E. etc.) to move the ICE contact up to the top of the contact list.

### Talking to Strangers

Teaching children about strangers is an essential and important part of helping to keep them safe. As they venture out into the community, either alone or with friends or family members, it is critical to teach them beforehand how to distinguish between someone who is safe to talk to and who is not.

- Conversations should be limited or non-existent to potential strangers.
- Keep your guard up.
- Do not answer personal questions.
- Be polite but reserved.
- If you feel uncomfortable, walk away quickly.
- If you feel threatened or in danger, run away.
- Do not stand too close to stranger. Be mindful of personal space if a conversation happens to take place.

## **Who to Ask for Help**

It is very important for individuals to be able to advocate for themselves while out in the community. These self-advocacy skills include understanding how to ask for help if needed and knowing who to ask for help. The tips below address who to ask for help in an emergency or non-emergency situation. Ways to ask for help depend greatly on the circumstances surrounding the need for help.

### *EMERGENCY:*

- Say “HELP” out loud, repeat if needed.
- Move to a crowd (Safety in numbers).
- Reach out to a law enforcement officer, fireman, teacher, or person of authority.
- Speak to a Bus Driver.
- Seek out someone with other children.

### *Non-Emergency:*

- Reach out to a family member
- Contact a friend

## **What To Do If You Get Lost**

There may be concern that a person can get lost while out in the community, whether alone or with peers. It is important to prepare by talking to them about what to do if they get lost. Teaching them the steps below and taking extra precautions can help your loved one if they get lost:

- Here are the big three: STAY CALM, STAY PUT, MAKE NOISE.
- Do not panic.
- Stop where you are and try to remember your route.
- Re-think your steps.
- Do you remember any of the buildings, signs, houses?
- If available, use your cell phone to call 911 or home.
- Have identification available.
- Consider an Introduction Card (e.g., My name is David and I have Autism).
- Look for a police car or a law enforcement officer.
- Ensure the cell phone has the GPS mechanism activated.
- If you are lost in a mall or shopping center, look for security or ask a clerk for help.
- Ensure you have a small LED flashlight available at all times while traveling/walking.

## **Social and Personal Safety Tips for Using Either a Ladies or Men's Public Restroom:**

- Do not comment on the noises you hear coming from another stall! If someone is ill or needs your help, they will likely speak out to ask for help. If however, you do think someone is in a situation that requires serious help, seek out and ask a restroom attendant, store manager or security personnel for assistance.

### **Social Rules for Using a Public Men's Room**

The social rules in the public men's room include:

- Avoiding eye contact.
- Choosing a urinal or stall as far away from the other person as possible.
- Looking straight ahead or up and down when using a urinal or stall.
- Washing up and walking out without engaging in conversations

### **Social Rules for Using a Public Ladies Room**

Social rules in the ladies restroom differ from those in the men's room. Chit chat conversation is normal. For example, asking another woman where they got their blouse or t-shirt or giving a compliment on their appearance is OK.

Eye contact is typically acceptable. It is not, however, standard to talk to ladies in the public restroom, once you are using the stall. An exception? Passing toilet paper under a stall divider to a stranger in need who asks is not considered an unusual or suspicious activity.

### **Personal Safety**

Focusing on basic safety skills should be considered both necessary and appropriate for people with disabilities. These skills include:

- closing and locking bathroom or stall doors
- understanding personal privacy and who can and who cannot help you in the bathroom or with personal care skills
- body part identification using adult terminology (e.g., penis instead of peepee)
- using public restrooms independently
- the restriction of nudity to personal bathroom or bedroom
- the issue of personal space for both self and others

### **How to Prevent Sexual Abuse** (*The best time to talk to your child about sexual abuse is NOW.*)

The [National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#) provides some helpful tips on protecting children from sexual abuse:

- Teach children accurate names of private body parts.
- Avoid focusing exclusively on "stranger danger." Keep in mind that most children are abused by someone they know and trust.
- Teach children about body safety and the difference between "okay" and "not okay" touches.

- Let children know that they have the right to make decisions about their bodies. Empower them to say “no” when they do not want to be touched, even in non-sexual ways (e.g., politely refusing hugs) and to say “no” to touching others.
- Make sure children know that adults and older children never need help with their private body parts (e.g., bathing or going to the bathroom).
- Teach children to take care of their own private parts (i.e., bathing, wiping after bathroom use) so they don’t have to rely on adults or older children for help.
- Educate children about the difference between good secrets (like surprise parties—which are okay because they are not kept secret for long) and bad secrets (those that the child is supposed to keep secret forever, which are not okay).
- Trust your instincts! If you feel uneasy about leaving a child with someone, don’t do it. If you’re concerned about possible sexual abuse, ask questions.

### **Interacting with law enforcement**

While out in the community, people with disabilities may find themselves in situations in which they need to talk to or deal with law enforcement professionals. These officers may not have knowledge or prior training on how to deal effectively with the disability community.

As a result, it is essential to teach people with disabilities how to interact with law enforcement professionals in safe and productive ways. So what are the best options for the individual during a sudden interaction with a law enforcement officer during an emergency or non-emergency situation?

#### **Invisible Disability: Disclosure Tools and Options**

- Consider using a handout card. <https://www.justdigit.org/wallet-cards/> or <https://autismidcard.com/> or develop a handout card that can be easily copied and laminated.
- Remember that the handout card is replaceable. You can give it away to the officer on the scene.
- Carry several at all times.
- The handout card can be generic or specific to you.
- Work with a disability support organization to develop a generic handout.
- Work with persons whose opinions you trust and value to develop a person-specific handout.

What's the best way to tell the officer that you have a handout?

- Avoid making sudden movements to reach for the handout card.
- Obtain permission or signal your intentions before reaching into your coat or pants pockets, briefcases or bags, or in to glove compartments of vehicles.
- Verbally let the officer know that you have a disability and have an information card for them to read. If nonverbal, or if sudden interactions prevent you from speaking, consider using a medical alert bracelet for an officer to read that alerts them to your condition and the fact that you have an information card.

## **Disclosure to a Police Officer**

The decision to disclose your diagnosis to a police officer will always be yours to make. If you have learned through experience that disclosure would be helpful in a particular situation, you may decide to disclose to a police officer. Law enforcement officers report that they make their best decisions when they have their best information

## **Plan and Practice Disclosure Techniques**

Plan your response and practice with others for a sudden encounter. Careful preparation is your best chance to have a successful interaction with law enforcement.

- Discuss these risks with people that you trust.
- Develop a hard person-specific disclosure handout.
- Develop a personal plan as to how you will use the handout.
- Practice through role playing with people you know and trust.
- Adapt and amend disclosure handouts. They are only paper. They are not written in stone.

## **Further Suggestions to Consider During Sudden Interactions with Police**

- Do not attempt to flee.
- Do not make sudden movements or reach for items.
- Try to remain calm.
- If you are a victim or are reporting a crime, you may want the police to contact a family member, advocate or friend who can help you through the interview process.
- Carry the phone number of an advocacy organization or personal advocate, relative or friend