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.

- 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