

The Dangers of Ignoring Mental Health and Developmental Issues:

How Law Enforcement Continues to Fail the Most Vulnerable



In a vast majority of cases...research reveals the following patterns:

Disability frequently goes unmentioned or is listed as an attribute without context.

A medical condition or "mental illness" is often used to blame victims for their deaths.

An estimated 80% of all cases that involve disability are broadly categorized as "mental illness".¹

Individuals with mental illnesses, such as schizophrenia, may experience anxiety or paranoia when encountering officers, which may lead them to behave erratically.

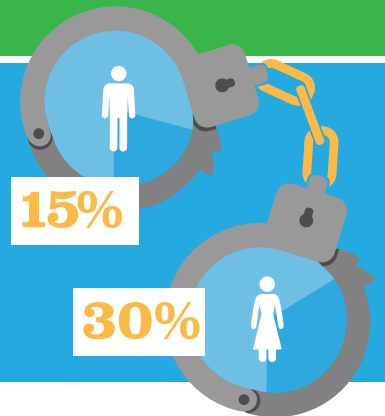
Persons with autism or Asperger's Syndrome may not recognize uniforms, badges or emergency vehicles. They may run from or, alternatively, be attracted to them in an obsessive or dangerous way. They may also be drawn to shiny objects and reach for a badge or gun.²

 **1 in 10** police encounters
+
 **1 in 4** fatal police encounters
involve someone with mental illness.³

People with mental illness are **16x** more likely to be killed by police than others³... and make up **1/3 to 1/2** of all people killed by law enforcement.⁴

While those with an intellectual disability comprise **2% to 3%** of the general population, they represent **4% to 10%** of the prison population, with an even greater number of those in juvenile facilities and in jails.⁵

Approximately **15% of men and 30% of women** in local jails have a serious mental illness.⁶



Interaction Suggestions for First Responders:²

Use five or less words

Speak slowly

Use simple, concrete language

Give commands or requests one at a time

Try working one-on-one with the individual and interacting in a smaller, enclosed environment

Consider other means of communication, such as picture boards, writing information down, offering pen and paper or a computer, or even singing or whispering the request or instruction (even with adults)



For more information or for our sources, visit focusforhealth.org