

# Autism Kit for First Responders

 [hussmanautism.org/autism-kit-for-first-responders/](https://hussmanautism.org/autism-kit-for-first-responders/)

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*In stressful situations, such as emergencies, people with autism may experience heightened challenges with communication and sensory perception. The sensory kit below includes items that may be helpful to officers, such as tips on assisting and interacting with a person with autism, as well as communication boards and visuals to make communication more accessible, and sensory items that may be comforting or regulating to the person with autism.*

**Clicking on any of the graphics below will open a high-resolution, printable version in a full-size window.**

### **This bag includes:**

- Communication boards
  - ID/information sentence starters
  - "I need \_\_\_"
  - "I feel \_\_\_"
  - "Police --> Help --> It's okay"
  - Reassuring phrases
  - Letterboard
- Dry erase card and marker
- Noise-canceling headphones
- Sunglasses
- Liquid bubbler
- Push pop fidget
- Stress ball
- Plush dog



- **Dry erase card**
  - Offer simple drawings or short clear instructions
  - Offer yes/no or a. b. c. d. responses
- **Noise-canceling headphones**
  - Softens/reduces noise (or too many sounds at once)
- **Sunglasses**
  - Reduces visual discomfort (car lights, the sun, etc.)
- **Liquid bubbler**
  - Calming visual support
- **Push pop fidget**
  - Calming / anxiety relief, keeps hands busy
- **Stress ball**
  - Grounding, calming / tension relief
- **Plush dog**
  - Comforting / calming to hug or squeeze tightly

- Offer two or three choices at a time  
- Offer supports proactively / as soon as you see fit

[www.hussmanautism.org](http://www.hussmanautism.org)




**Our suggested sensory kit includes:**

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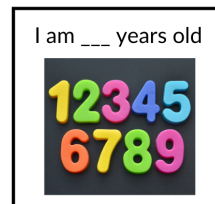
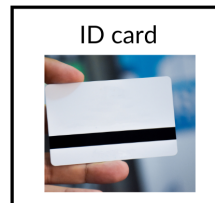
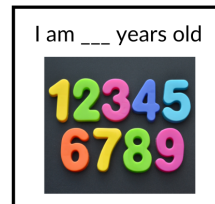
**Autism support tips for first responders:**

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 <p><b>Autism Tips for First Responders</b></p> <p>www.husmanautism.org</p>	<p><b>Autism generally impacts:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Language processing</li> <li>• Behavior</li> <li>• Social interaction</li> <li>• Sensory processing</li> </ul> <p>When a person is non-speaking, they may communicate through their actions, expressions, or body language.</p> <p><b>Behavior reflects an underlying need</b></p> <p>As anxiety increases, the ability to process language decreases.</p>	<p><b>Understand the importance of routines and predictability</b></p> <p>Allow the person to maintain routine if possible</p> <p>Do not interrupt a compulsive routine if it is not dangerous (doing so may provoke <b>extreme distress</b>)</p> <p>Use "first ___ then ___" statements to prepare for change or explain events</p>	<p><b>Recognize fear</b></p> <p><i>We all react with a fight, flight, or freeze response</i></p> <p>Instill calm / offer reassurance</p> <p>Avoid crowding and maintain a safe distance (for the person, yourself, and for bystanders)</p> <p>Impulse control may be significantly challenged, and the person may act quickly without considering or understanding the consequences</p>
<p><b>Behavior Differences</b></p> <p>Some people may rely on routines or repetitive behaviors to self-regulate and calm down in anxiety-provoking situations.</p> <p><b>These routines are better completed than interrupted.</b> Interrupting self-regulating behaviors can cause further distress and anxiety.</p> <p><b>Do not interpret unusual behavior as belligerent or aggressive.</b></p> <p>In a tense situation, a person may cope by covering their ears or eyes, shaking or rocking, swinging their arms, or by humming, vocalizing, or repeating phrases.</p>	<p><b>De-escalation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Calm creates calm</b></li> <li>• <b>Identify the need:</b> "Help me understand"</li> <li>• <b>Validate:</b> "Yes, I know you want..."</li> <li>• <b>Reassure:</b> "Yes, I'm trying to help..."</li> <li>• <b>Say what you want</b> - not what you don't want</li> <li>• <b>Replace:</b> offer alternatives to meet need differently</li> <li>• <b>Reduce fear:</b> try to avoid coercion</li> <li>• <b>Allow time and space to defuse</b></li> </ul>	<p><b>Reduce sources of overstimulation</b></p> <p>Turn off sirens and flashing lights</p> <p>Ask others to move away, or move the person to quieter surroundings</p> <p>Keep canines in the law enforcement vehicle</p> <p>Remember that covering ears or moving away may be an attempt to reduce stimulation</p>	<p><b>Communicate effectively</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish rapport—let the person know you are there to help and protect</li> <li>• Use your name rather than your title</li> <li>• Learn and use the person's name</li> <li>• Keep commands and comments short</li> <li>• Say it and show it</li> <li>• Check for understanding</li> <li>• Explain your actions in advance</li> <li>• Pause and wait for an answer</li> </ul>
<p><b>Be Patient</b></p> <p>Interactions with people with autism may require more time</p> <p>Listen attentively</p> <p>Wait for the person to finish talking, typing, formulating thoughts and words</p> <p>Limit the number of officers providing instructions</p>	<p><b>Keep in mind YOUR part in the communication exchange</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use the word yes</li> <li>• Speak calmly - use a normal tone of voice</li> <li>• Use short, direct phrases</li> <li>• Use non-threatening body language and avoid abrupt movements or actions</li> </ul>	<p><b>Be aware of different forms of communication</b></p> <p>Some people may use speech, while others may use gestures or sign language</p> <p>Some may type or write to communicate</p> <p>Others may select picture icons on a speech generating device or may carry a book of communication icons</p>	<p><b>Use all available resources</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speak to the person first (and as frequently as possible)</li> <li>• Allow a family member, friend, or direct support staff to assist if necessary</li> <li>• Look for medical alert bracelets or necklaces</li> <li>• Look for medical identification tags on clothing, shoelaces, or belts</li> <li>• Check 911-Address-Flagging database</li> </ul>

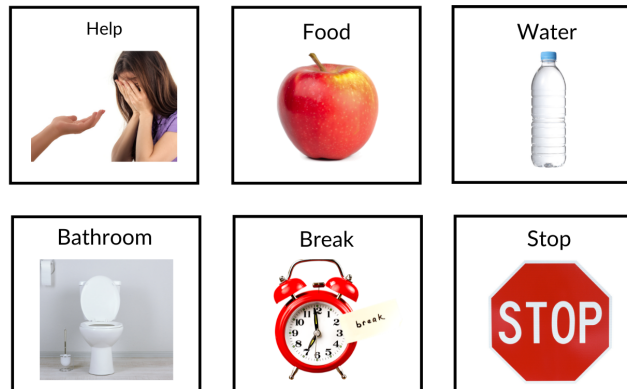
## Communication supports:

- ID/information sentence starters

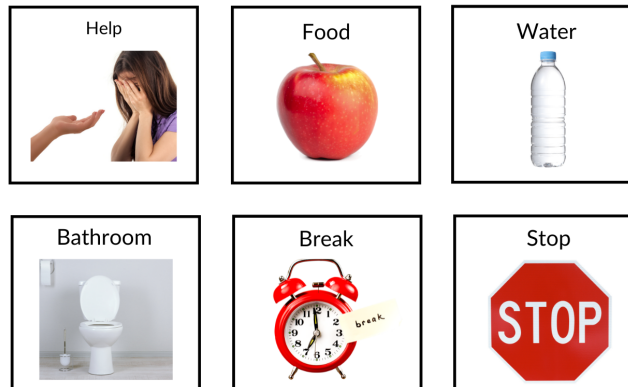


- Common words with pictures ("I need \_\_\_\_")

**I need...**



**I need...**



- “I feel \_\_\_\_”

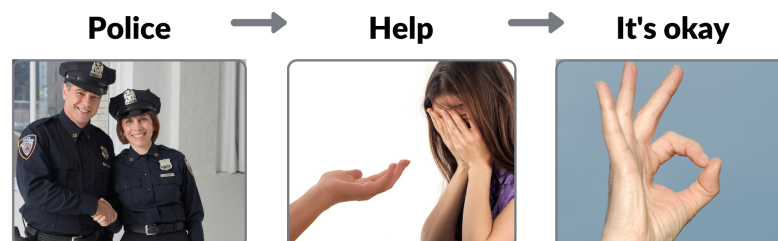
I feel...



I feel...



- “Police → Help → It’s okay”



- Reassuring phrases

**I am here to help.**

**You are safe.**

**I know you want \_\_\_\_\_, I will help you \_\_\_\_\_.**

**Yes. First \_\_\_\_\_ then \_\_\_\_\_**

**Now \_\_\_\_\_ later \_\_\_\_\_**

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**I am here to help.**

**You are safe.**

**I know you want \_\_\_\_\_, I will help you \_\_\_\_\_.**

**Yes. First \_\_\_\_\_ then \_\_\_\_\_**

**Now \_\_\_\_\_ later \_\_\_\_\_**

- Letterboard
  1. Alphabetic
  2. QWERTY
- Dry erase card and marker:
- Clear backpack:
- MarcoPromos Clear Security Backpack

## **Sensory supports:**

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- Noise-canceling headphones:  
NEIKO Adjustable Safety Earmuffs for Noise Reduction 2 pk
- Sunglasses:  
Nasidear 36 Pack 18 Colors Neon Sunglasses
- Liquid bubbler:  
Super Z Outlet Liquid Motion Bubbler 4 pk
- Push pop fidget:  
PFCA Fidget Toys 3 Pack Push Pop Bubble Sensory Fidget



- Stress ball:  
[Sensory Stress Ball Set 12 Pack](#)
- Stuffed animal / plush:  
[Kohl's Cares Stuffed Animals](#)

## Using the support kit:

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- **Communication boards**

- ID Information (Sentence Starters)
- "I need \_\_\_\_"  
If someone is upset and does not communicate through speech (or is unable to communicate due to stress), the visual prompts on this communication board may be helpful.
- "I feel \_\_\_\_"  
A good way to start an interaction with someone non-speaking might be to ask them how they are – and then to offer this support. If they do point to a response, you can read it aloud.
- Police → Help → It's okay
- Reassuring Phrases  
Providing reassurance helps someone know they are safe, not in danger, and hopefully offers insight on what is going on the situation, what is expected & what will happen next

- **Letterboard (includes yes / no)**

- In situations where choices are being offered or basic information/responses are being elicited, a letterboard may be helpful. Some individuals with autism may communicate using visual prompts, or by pointing at letters. It is important to watch closely to see what they spell (the officer can also repeat what they typed).
- It can be helpful to place letterboard on a flat surface
- If someone is non-speaking and can communicate by pointing, keep the letterboard out so it is accessible to them
- This can accompany the other communication visuals such as picture boards

- **Dry erase card & marker**

- Can be used to offer simple drawings or short clear instructions. Individuals with autism often respond to visuals (even stick figure drawings) even if they do not respond to verbal requests
- Useful in offering yes/no or a. b. c. d. choices
- Can help predictability: Write down a quick list of what will happen (1. First wait here 2. Mom is coming 3. Go home)
- Person can also write or draw on board to communicate

- **Noise-canceling headphones**

- Helpful with loud or overwhelming noises (cars, sirens, etc.) – particularly if someone is holding their ears
- Also helpful with many noises at once (even though you may not perceive these noises as loud, uncomfortable, or distracting), multiple noises can be uncomfortable, frustrating, or overwhelming for someone who is sensitive to noise
- The headphones still allow the person to hear, but just reduces noise

- **Sunglasses**

- Individuals with autism may be more sensitive to light
- May include – flashing/strobe/LED lights, bright sunlight, etc.
- Signs of visual sensitivity include looking down, avoiding looking up, blinking a lot, keeping eyes closed, or covering / pressing on eyes
- Pressing on eyes also a sign of stress or overwhelm *Note that with both headphones / sunglasses – someone may not be able to focus their attention on you or listen / communicate if they are overwhelmed by the sensory input of noises or light – offering this type of support can really help them to focus, communicate, and feel more comfortable*

- **Additional Supports**

These may be provided based on individual preference – there's not one specific "reason" each of these may be supportive / enjoyable / relaxing to someone, rather, a person might have a specific preference as to what is most supportive to them / what they like/prefer. As long as the person is not hurting themselves or putting anyone in danger, these sensory items can be used in whatever way that is helpful. It's also okay for someone to have "busy hands" – even if they aren't holding a sensory support – so long as they are not, again, putting anyone in danger – flapping hands, playing with fingers in front of eyes, etc. can be regulating – using the body as built-in sensory support.

- **Liquid bubbler**

- Calming visual input for someone who appears physically relaxed but distracted/stressed/anxious in communication, expression, or behavior – this might be gentle support
    - Can also shake it, move it around etc. (this is okay – repetitive movement is often calming)

- **Push pop fidget**

- Calming / anxiety relief, keeps hands occupied – if the person is reaching for things that they should not be, or engaging in things like scratching or pinching skin (due to anxiety), etc.
    - Can be a "fun" sensory support – if the person is just waiting and needs something to do (perhaps their parent is talking to officer)
    - Offers popping noise which some people enjoy or find supportive (auditory input)

- **Stress ball**

- Grounding, calming / tension relief
    - Squeezing can also help if someone is feeling more upset or aggressive (let energy out this way)
    - When trying to help calm someone, you can say, "Squeeze now," or "Can you squeeze it 5 times?" (to cool down or regulate)

- **Plush dog**

- Can hug or squeeze plush dog tightly (a type of proprioceptive input). This can be very regulating and help center a person – squeezing something tightly offers this type of sensory input
    - Can also be a comfort object for the person

**Possible additional or alternative components:**

- Kids Weighted Lap Pad 17x22in 2lbs
    - 6Pcs Fidget Toys Textured Stretchy String Sensory Toy
    - 12Pcs Wacky Track Snap Sensory Click Toys

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