

# 10 Facts Law Enforcement Needs to Know

*When Serving & Protecting People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD)*



- 1. People with disabilities make up the single largest minority group in the U.S. and officers who have the skill set to work with this population have a significant advantage over officers who do not.** Officers may not realize just how common disability issues impact everyday society or the issues they pose while on the job. The more educated the officer is about disabilities in general, the more likely safe and positive outcomes will occur between law enforcement and people with disabilities.
- 2. Using ADA accommodations decreases liability and improves community trust.** By law, people with disabilities are entitled to the same level of access to law enforcement services as provided to those without disabilities. Law enforcement can avoid liability by ensuring officers are trained to interact and communicate effectively with people with disabilities. It's important to increase community trust by demonstrating an understanding and acceptance of people with disabilities.
- 3. Training for law enforcement on Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) is rare, and yet the need is rising.** Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) programs, which sometimes include the topic of I/DD, but only briefly, are not mandatory or provided at all police departments, and the rise of incidence of some I/DDs, such as autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASDs), heightens demand.
- 4. Citizens with I/DD are over-represented in the criminal justice system.** Many citizens with disabilities end up in the criminal justice system with their disability playing a role in the situation that led them there. People with disabilities are twice as likely to be victims of violent crime (those with cognitive disabilities in particular face the greatest risk). As suspects, they are highly suggestible and often desperate for connection to other people, making it that much easier for perpetrators to take advantage of them.
- 5. Intellectual Disability (ID) and mental illness are NOT the same and require different responses.** Citizens with these two different disabilities require a different response from officers, different strategies for communication and different resources/supports.



National Center on Criminal  
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*For more information on this topic, see the Pathways to Justice™ Training.*

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6. **People with I/DD have hidden disabilities that often go undetected by officers.** Officers come into contact with people with I/DD more often than they realize. Eighty-five to eighty-nine percent of people with I/DD have a “mild” disability or high-functioning I/DD. They often live in the community and may pretend to understand things when they do not, such as their Miranda rights.
7. **If a crisis is imminent and unavoidable, minimizing use of force is crucial.** Training officers should incorporate de-escalation strategies and/or protocols for working with people with I/DD and other disabilities. Any time use of force does occur, immediate medical response must be given to those exhibiting signs or complaining of injury or illness following or during use of force.
8. **Emotional reactions to law enforcement are often mistaken as deliberate “bad” behavior.** Officers who have a basic knowledge of people with I/DD are familiar with WHY they may behave or respond in certain ways. These officers are much more likely to use de-escalation strategies resulting in a positive outcome.
9. **Community policing approach works best for people with I/DD, not crisis intervention.** Much of the training officers receive about disabilities is focused on people with mental illness who are in crisis. Proactive policing (that incorporates a community policing or procedural justice approach) recognizes the need to build relationships with people with I/DD in the community to prevent miscommunications and potential for crisis down the road. Increasing the officer’s understanding of disability through face-

to-face interactions with people with I/DD is key to avoiding crisis for both citizen and officer.

10. **Building safer communities is a shared responsibility that should not fall to law enforcement alone.** Having an awareness of disability issues in order to protect the rights and lives of people with disabilities is crucial, but this is a job law enforcement cannot do alone. They must have support from people with disabilities, the disability community and the larger criminal justice community to tackle this issue with success.

For more information on this topic, see the *Pathways to Justice™ Training*.

**Words instead of guns**  
**Questions instead of orders**  
**Patience instead of immediate action**

*An Integrated Approach to De-Escalation and Minimizing Use of Force (Police Executive Research Forum Report, 2012)*

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