



An Autism Alert card helps autistic people disclose their autism to others when in difficult or emergency situations. Autism West Midlands' card has been produced in collaboration with West Midlands, West Mercia, Staffordshire and Warwickshire Police Forces and British Transport Police.

The credit-card style card gives basic information about autism, the name of the card carrier and provides details of one or two emergency contacts.

When an autistic individual (as either victim or perpetrator) shows a police officer or another member of the security services the card they are indicating that they are legally disabled under the Equality Act and may need extra support, extra time to process information given to them and if attending the police station may need the support of an Appropriate Adult.

What is autism?

Autism is a spectrum of conditions including Asperger Syndrome. It affects individuals differently but all share difficulties in:

- **Communication and interacting with others**
- **Experiencing their senses**
- **Thinking and behaving flexibly**

Autistic people may find it hard to make sense of what is going on around them, hold conversations, make and/or maintain eye-contact, understand emotions, make decisions, and adapt to changes. This makes them very vulnerable in emergency or crisis situations and they can show high levels of anxiety, and perhaps behaviours of concern.

For a short guide about autism please visit:

https://www.autismwestmidlands.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/A_Guide_To_Autism_Nov_2019.pdf

How may an autistic person react in challenging situations where the emergency services are involved?

They may behave in ways that seem inappropriate, or unusual. There are many ways this may manifest itself, but it could include:

- **Avoiding eye contact**
- **Seeming agitated, anxious, or aggressive**
- **Displaying repetitive behaviours such as rocking, flapping or reciting familiar scripts or phrases**
- **Being sensitive to noise or light, perhaps covering their ears or eyes**
- **Seeming to not understand what is being said**
- **Seeming rude or speaking bluntly**
- **Seeming to not understand the consequences of their actions**

What can you do to help?

- **Keep calm, try not raise your voice**
- **Keep your language to a minimum, explain clearly and simply what you are doing and give them time to process what you say**
- **Reduce sensory distractions such as sirens and flashing lights**
- **It may help to write down what is happening, autistic people often process visual information easier than verbal information**
- **Encourage them to move to a location away from other people**
- **Where possible seek support from their parent or emergency contact**

The following actions may serve to escalate the situation so please try to avoid:

- **Raising your voice**
- **Trying to stop the person making repetitive movements (e.g. rocking or flapping)**
- **Making physical contact, such touching or putting your arm around the person unless necessary and only use handcuffs if necessary**

The National Autistic Society have produced a detailed guide for police officers which covers advice on making an arrest, when suspects are in custody and interviewing autistic victims. You can download it from their website:

<https://www.autism.org.uk/shop/products/books-and-resources/autism-a-guide-for-police-officers-and-staff>

Autism West Midlands also offer a Parent/Carer Alert Card, you may be presented with this also.

This is a free printable download here:

<https://www.autismwestmidlands.org.uk/home/alert-cards/>

