

Disability Training for First Responders



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY



In this online training, we provide information and best practices to ensure the safety of people with disabilities and first responders, including EMT/paramedics, law enforcement, and firefighters.

Learning Objectives

1. To identify barriers that first responders face in serving people with disabilities and to provide and demonstrate effective methods to overcome these barriers.
2. To provide first responders with the information and methods that will help to ensure effective and appropriate communication between first responders and people with disabilities.



Learning Objectives, cont.

3. To provide first responders with guidance on how to identify characteristics or behaviors of people with disabilities that could be mistakenly viewed as threatening, and to identify best practices to avoid escalating the situation.
4. To identify groups of people who may need special consideration with regard to transportation or situational orientation and to identify best practices for addressing those needs. These will include safe lifting, carrying, loading, and evacuation methods.
5. To highlight portions of a Federal law called the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 that are relevant for first responders. The ADA states that reasonable accommodations must be provided when necessary for people with disabilities to receive the same level of services as the general population.



Important Note

First responders encounter a wide variety of emergency situations, and naturally, protecting and saving lives is of utmost importance. The recommendations and tips presented in this training are *best practices*. However, we understand these practices may not always be feasible when faced with a life or death situation.

Thank you for the important work that you do.



The Disability Training for First Responders addresses *four types* of functional impairments, or disabilities, including:

- Blindness/Visual Impairments
- Communication Barriers
- Cognitive Impairments
- Mobility Impairments



General Tips

- Determine the person's ability to see, hear, and understand you before intervening
- Introduce yourself, your co-workers, and briefly describe what you going to do
- Always speak directly to the person you are helping
 - Keep messages simple and direct
 - Speak to adults as adults, and children as children
 - When necessary use picture boards, gestures, or pen and paper
 - Ask for help if needed
- Use person-first language
- Do not speak louder than normal, unless asked
- Offer reassurance



Blindness and Visual Impairments

When you arrive on the scene:

- Introduce yourself and state the reason that you are there
- Let the person feel your badge, hear a siren chirp, or call dispatch

Communication/Orientation:

- Don't worry about saying "see" or "look"
- Speak to the person as you move around the room
- Keep the person updated on the location of their belongings
- Convey any written information orally
- Before touching the person, describe what you are going to do and how it will feel



Service Animals

- A service animal is a dog that is trained to do work for a person with a disability
- Service animals can help people with a variety of disabilities
- “Where the handler goes, the animal goes”
- When helping someone with a service dog, move slowly and use a calm voice
- When loading a service animal into an ambulance, load the animal using the side door since *open* diamond plating can injure a dog’s feet
- If an animal is injured, or if the handler is injured and cannot control their dog:
 - Lead the dog with the leash, *not the harness*
 - Do *not* just take a service dog to the nearest shelter; transport the dog to a veterinary facility of the handler’s choice



Communication Barriers

- Includes people who are Deaf or hard of hearing, people who have speech impairments, and people with limited English proficiency
- Ask the person how you can best communicate with them; you may communicate through pen and paper or cell phones, mobile apps, and other mobile devices
- Provide an interpreter if one is requested; be sure to address the person who is deaf, *not* the interpreter
- Do not assume that the person does not think clearly
- Do not interrupt the person or pretend to understand if you do not
- Ask them to point to the part of their body that is hurt



Cognitive Impairments

- Cognitive impairments can include
 - Autism Spectrum Disorder
 - Intellectual and developmental disabilities (such as Down syndrome)
 - Pre-existing traumatic brain injuries
 - Mental illness
 - Dementia
- People with cognitive impairments represent a vulnerable and highly stigmatized population
- Cognitive impairments affect thinking, feeling, behavior
- The person may be more susceptible to effects of stress



Cognitive Impairments

- Listen to the family, but *speak to the person first*
- Give directions one step at a time, using clear and concise language
- The person may be eager to please you, so watch for tendency to agree with you or respond “yes” no matter the question
- Do not point out or try to change strange behaviors; likewise, do not try to rationalize with a person who is delusional
- Before touching the person, tell them what you will be doing and how it will feel
- Be aware of sensory concerns; give the person space and reduce noise and lights when possible
- Do not assume that a person with mental illness is dangerous



Mobility Impairments

- The person may be unable to use one or more extremities, or lack strength or stamina
- They may use a walker, wheelchair, crutches, or other assistive device
- Treat wheelchairs and other devices as an extension of the person's body

Obesity:

- Rates of obesity have doubled in past 20 years; rates have tripled in teens
- People who are obese are more likely to have chronic health conditions and, therefore, may be more likely to require emergency medical services
- People who are overweight or obese face a negative bias; this bias may affect the quality of the service they receive



Mobility Impairments

Transportation:

- Ask how the person has been transported before
- Not all lift, carry, load, and position techniques will be safe; avoid using classic “fireman carry”
- Ask before removing someone from their wheelchair
- Most ambulances are *not* equipped to transport people in wheelchairs; find local transportation resources (i.e. ambulettes, lift-equipped vans or buses)
- Check to be sure your squad has blood pressure cuffs, cervical collars, straps, and other equipment in pediatric, youth, adult, and extra-large sizes
- Special ramps, winch systems, bariatric tarps and stretchers are available



Watch the training video at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jdBbLdmsltU>

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