

Crisis Prevention and Response Law Enforcement and Autism

Crisis Prevention and Response

There has long been a need for more comprehensive crisis services for people with autism and other developmental disabilities. In 2006 the North Carolina Practice Improvement Collaborative (www.ncpic.net) outlined a set of principles upon which community-based crisis services for people with developmental disabilities should be based stating that “An effective crisis management system is key to individuals remaining in their homes and leading healthy and productive lives.”

Key Principles:

- Crisis services for individuals with developmental disabilities must address factors such as social-emotional, health-related, financial, family, environmental as well as possible psychiatric issues.
- Every person’s person-centered plan should have an individual crisis prevention plan, health/safety plan and positive behavioral support plan as appropriate.
- All citizens with developmental disabilities should have access to an array of crisis response options that are flexible and part of the community.
- LME-MCOs have a vital role in advancing, promoting, and overseeing an effective crisis management system for persons with developmental disabilities.
- The funding should support prevention and intervention services, including training, technical assistance and direct services by professionals with knowledge of the needs of people with developmental disabilities to ensure the fidelity of the services with a community team support focus.
- Encourage the development of a model that provides access to expanded resources, including specialized community support services and professionals designed to prevent or address crisis situations. Such resources may include psychologists, behavioral specialists, and primary health care professionals so that crisis may be addressed without the involvement of traditional emergency response, like law enforcement, emergency rooms, justice systems.
- Ensure the financial model supports the development of comprehensive crisis management approaches consistent with person-centered community supports.

ASNC believes that training must also be available to law enforcement, other first responders, emergency preparedness programs, courts, magistrates, and departments of social services, all of whom may be on the front lines of different types of crisis situations that involve individuals with autism and their families.

North Carolina has begun to develop a better crisis system with the implementation of START which stands for Systematic Therapeutic Assessment Respite and Treatment. It is a well-established program developed in Massachusetts in 1989. The START model serves adults and children with developmental disabilities and mental illness or behavioral difficulties and includes Collaborative Contacts, After Hours Contacts, Emergency Meetings, START Respite for short-term crisis, Planned Respite, Emergency Respite Services (less than 30 days), and Psychiatric Inpatient Services. The NC START program does not have enough resources to meet the needs of everyone presenting with a crisis. NC needs to fund options for crisis prevention and intervention, as well as quality, consistent services that address individual’s daily needs.

Law Enforcement, First Responders, Other Systems and Autism

One challenge to having a lack of services and limited access to crisis response specifically designed for those with complex IDD, is that often those in crisis find themselves facing law enforcement, first responders, department of social services and justice systems who are all involved in traditional crisis response. Many of people working in these systems have limited knowledge of people with autism and other developmental disabilities.

In 2006, following the death of someone with autism during a law enforcement response to crisis, the state of North Carolina began requiring 25 hours of training about autism developmental disabilities, as well as mental illness and substance use disorders, to be included in its required Basic Law Enforcement Training (BLET) for new officers. At the same time, the state began funding programs like those at ASNC to offer training to current law enforcement and other first responders who may not have been reached with BLET. ASNC trains anywhere from 150 to 900 law enforcement and other first responders a year with live in-person or web-based training. In addition, ASNC has partnered with self-advocates, law enforcement, and community foundations to produce a 15-minute video to provide brief information on autism and help foster better interactions with law enforcement. Please see our [“Staying Safe” page](#) for more information on community safety, including a link to the LEO 15-minute video, training links, safety tools, and other tips.

ASNC supports national and statewide efforts to extend training on autism to crisis response agencies who are not yet training their personnel including existing law enforcement, fire departments, federal and state emergency management, local departments of social services, magistrates, court personnel, judges, as well as prison and jail staff.

We are especially concerned about extending training requirements to government agencies including social services, courts, and other justice systems, who do not currently have mandatory training, and who routinely have contact with people on the spectrum and their families. It is those encounters, where people may be at their most vulnerable, confused, and scared, where training is critical to ensuring positive outcomes.