



# CommunicAbility

A Quarterly Newsletter For Our Community Members with Disabilities

## Summer/Fall 2021 Vol. 20, Ed. 2

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*“Disrespect rarely motivates a man.”*

- Courtney Joseph

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## Law Enforcement Interaction Respect, Communication and Documentation

Whether you are at a protest rally, receiving a speeding ticket or just simply being in the wrong place at the wrong time, it's important to know a few rules for safely interacting with law enforcement officers. Unfortunately, risk of injury or worse between officers and people with disabilities is in the news on a regular basis. So, we've put together a guide on what to do when interacting with the police.

**Listen** - When you hear commands from a law enforcement officer, you need to obey and do as you are told. Part of good communication is "listening." **Lack of communicating effectively is what gets people injured or killed.** If you've been asked to stop, don't continue to wheel away, drive away or continue with your current activity. You may have a strong visual cue (like a wheelchair) to silently communicate that you are a person with a disability, but that does not give you a free pass or absolve your legal responsibility to obey a command from a police officer. *If you have a hidden disability such as deafness, you need to communicate your condition with sign language or point to a card or badge.* **Keep your hands in front of your body at all times.**

**Hands up** - If you are not asked to put your hands up, it is still imperative that you keep both hands visible at any given moment. Don't reach for anything and keep them still. This will help the officer to feel less fearful (yes, they are just as worried as you are about safety).

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New Horizons Un-Limited is a Milwaukee-based, non-profit organization that provides individuals with lifelong disabilities increased access to the information, tools and life experiences that will enable them to improve their lives.



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## Law Enforcement Interaction—Respect, Communication... *(continued from page 1)*

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**Be Respectful** - Even if you feel you are being unjustly targeted or disrespected yourself, be respectful. If you feel the officer is wrong, it's ok to simply and calmly state that...once. If your explanation is not accepted then stop offering it and let the officer write that ticket or continue with their job. A few minutes of humiliation or anger is not worth the risk of injury. You can file a complaint with the police department afterwards. Do not tell the officer that you are filing a complaint as this will only escalate the situation.

**Show A Medical ID** - If the situation warrants it, **explain your disability or medical condition that can make following commands difficult**. Be prepared and have medical documents such as a state issued ID card or a medical alert/ID badge from an organization dedicated to your particular disability. A doctor's note with their phone number is also a good idea. The more documentation you have, the better.

**Never Reach For Those Documents** - When you are explaining your disability and you have documentation, just tell the officer where he or she can find it – in your wallet or glove compartment for example. **Never reach** for it – always wait for instructions from the officer.

**If You Are Cuffed** - Stop talking. At this point, you are under arrest and your Miranda Rights have been stated in front of you by the officer. Remember that most law enforcement officers have body cameras on them. This is for everyone's safety but it can be used against you later—things that you said out of anger or fear are recorded and this will not help you or your lawyer later when you have to go to court.

**Know Your Basic Rights** - It doesn't hurt to review your basic rights or the first Ten Amendments of The Constitution. If you don't know the law, you may make assumptions that the officer you dealt with violated your "rights" when in fact they have not. Same goes the other way too. It's important though not to confront the officer in the moment—wait until the interaction is over, and then file a complaint as soon as possible or consult a lawyer.

**Say "Yes" To A Search** - Generally speaking, if you have done nothing wrong or illegal to the best of your knowledge, it's better to say yes to a search of your being, car or home. If however, you feel the officer has violated your rights, made a huge mistake or the interaction is confrontational, you do have the right to say no – especially to a search of your home.

Hopefully, by demonstration good communication skills (listening, hands visible and respectful language) you will never end up in a situation that escalates and puts both you and the office at risk for serious injury.

### For Families and Caregivers of People with Learning or Emotional Disabilities

There are two additional things that can be done with your loved ones or people in your care.

**Get a badge** in addition to medical documentation. For example, the PFA (Pathfinders For Autism), State agencies, DMVs and even Amazon have cards, badges and bracelets you can order. It explains that the wearer has Autism and what behaviors law enforcement can expect from them in an encounter.



**Practice and Role Play** with your family member or client. While it's impossible to practice for every possible scenario, you can go over the basic rules outlined above. Explain that you need "stay where you are". Don't run away or run towards the officer. Have them say "I have a badge, card or ID bracelet" but explain how important it is to not reach for them – the officer will get it or look at it. Practice holding hands still. All of this, no matter how simple it sounds, can help your family member avoid serious injury.

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## In the Meantime...

It does seem unfair that individuals with the same rights and freedoms as those without disabilities, would have to take additional steps to be safe, *but it's the reality right now in the US.* In the meantime, it is very necessary in some areas of the US -- to let local, state, and national representatives know that officers need to be trained to interact safely with community members who may respond differently to commands and questions from them.

In 2015, the Arc, one the country's largest disability-rights organization, launched its own program to teach law enforcement officers, lawyers, victim-services providers and other criminal-justice professionals how to identify, interact with and accommodate people with special needs and hidden disabilities. "We're talking about having a community really understand each other, and what that can look like," says Leigh Ann Davis, who leads the ARC's National Center on Criminal Justice and Disability. The program has now trained 2,000 people in 14 states.

Another example of community involvement is in Eugene, Oregon. The White Bird Clinic in Oregon runs a program known as CAHOOTS (Crises Assistance Helping Out On The Streets), a program that reroutes 911 and non-emergency calls relating to mental health, substance abuse or homelessness to a team of medics and crisis-care workers. Those teams respond to such calls instead of—not alongside—police.

Of course, each community should decide what they can do. Law enforcement should know as much as possible who is in their community and which other services they can call upon. This makes it easier to understand when someone is not resisting or disobeying a command. It makes it easier for everyone to be safe even if they can't or don't communicate **that they mean no harm!**

## A Word About Disability ID Cards

The Unites States doesn't have a uniform disability Card for Hidden Disabilities like deafness or autism but here is a list of places and organizations to search for appropriate cards or badges that can alert authorities to a hidden disability. It also helps to have backup documentation like a note from a doctor with a telephone number.

- Check your local DMV
- Check your State Agencies
- Look for organizations dedicated to specific disabilities
- Search for retailers of ID cards, badges and bracelets online
- Make your own – but have important information like contact numbers of family members and physicians.

Go to Emergency Medical Information and Identification products @ <https://www.new-horizons.org/safidi.html>

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## Disabilities, Families and the Police

Prepare and practice role playing in possible scenarios that deal with police interactions.

CAHOOTS	NO HUGS THIS TIME
NEEDS	POLICE
COMMANDS	PRACTICE
COMPLIANCE	ROLE PLAY
HANDS VISABLE	STAY STILL
SAFETY	I HAVE A BADGE
PREPARE	AWARENESS
TRAINING	ID CARD
REHEARSE	FAMILY

X A S P R E P A R E Y T H L O N  
 A P T M O G A Y A T K N N R D O  
 C O A M P L I A N C E S E E Y H  
 E L F W E A W P S C P I I E E U  
 T I A L P F A I B U A H K I D G  
 I C M U L I R T A M Y H O K R S  
 M E I S A F E T Y A T V O L S T  
 K F L C Y O N U S M C E F O T H  
 P E Y D Y N E O T C I A A D T I  
 R M H E A R S E S E B B W C Y S  
 A I O O P T S A P Y E A C A S T  
 C A N R H C O M M A N D S R T I  
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