



## **Fire Fighters**

When a team of fire fighters responds to a call, there is usually a dangerous situation at hand. Upon reaching the scene it is critical for these first responders to immediately get to work in order to keep the people in these situations safe. When encountering a person with an autism spectrum disorder, the fire fighters may need to adjust their emergency response accordingly. In situations where the individual may be at risk, it is vital that the fire fighters be able to identify certain signs that may indicate that the person has ASD. The proper training and knowledge of autism spectrum disorders will help the fire fighters to deal with the emergency in the most successful way. With the correct information and preparation regarding autism spectrum disorders, these fire fighters will be more equipped to rescue these individuals and ensure their safety.

### **Quick Facts for Fire Fighters**

- Individuals with autism can't be identified by appearance. They look the same as anyone else. They're identified by their behavior.
- Some individuals with autism do not have a normal range of sensations and may not feel the cold, heat, or pain in a typical manner. In fact they may fail to acknowledge pain in spite of significant pathology being present. They may show an unusual pain response that could include laughter, humming, singing and removing of clothing.
- Speak in short clear phrases "Get in." "Sit Down." "Wait here." An individual with autism may take longer to respond to directives, and that can be because they don't understand what's being demanded of them, or even just because they're scared, they may not be able to process the language and understand a directive when fearful.
- When restraint is necessary, be aware that many individuals with autism have a poorly developed upper trunk area. Positional asphyxiation could occur if steps are not taken to prevent it: frequent change of position, not keeping them face down. Individuals with autism may continue to resist restraint.
- Adults with autism are just as likely to hide, like children, in a fire situation. Closets, under bed and behind furniture checks need to be done during search and rescue.
- These individuals are a bolt risk after rescue. Firefighter must stay with the individual with autism.

Cannata, W. (2007). *Autism 101 for Fire and Rescue*, from SPEAK Web site: [www.papremisealert.com](http://www.papremisealert.com)

### **Resources for Fire Fighters**

Autism Alliance for Local Emergency Responder Training - [www.AutismAlert.org](http://www.AutismAlert.org)

Avoiding Unfortunate Situations - [policeandautism.cjb.net](http://policeandautism.cjb.net)

Select Autism Merchandise - [www.SelectAutismMerchandise.com](http://www.SelectAutismMerchandise.com)

The Law Enforcement Awareness Network – [www.leanonus.org](http://www.leanonus.org)

The Autism and Law Enforcement Education Coalition - [www.sncarc.org/alec.htm](http://www.sncarc.org/alec.htm)

Autism Risk and Safety Management - [www.autismriskmanagement.com](http://www.autismriskmanagement.com)

Project Lifesaver - [www.projectlifesaver.org](http://www.projectlifesaver.org)

Community and Law Enforcement Aware Response - [www.clearscv.org](http://www.clearscv.org)

Autism 101 for Fire and Rescue - [www.autismlink.com/pages/emergency\\_firerescue](http://www.autismlink.com/pages/emergency_firerescue)

Caretrak Systems – [www.caretrak.com](http://www.caretrak.com)

Autism Society of America - [Information for Law Enforcement and Other First Responders](#) (PDF)

[Disaster Prep](#) - (PDF)

[ALEC Brochure](#) - (PDF)

