



Autism Project

Palm Bay Police Department

For information Contact
Sergeant Tina Hensel at
321-726-5652

HELPING POLICE INTERACT WITH INDIVIDUALS WITH AUTISM

APRIL 2018

A tool to communicate with Law Enforcement and others

The Palm Bay Police Department has partnered with the Wallet Card® Project to provide a quick and painless way to tell a police officer about your disability and what specific triggers such as loud noises or bright lights affect you or mannerisms when you are anxious such as rocking and pacing back and forth. It is completely voluntary.

The Wallet Card® is for individuals who have Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) to help disclose their disability. There may be a time when a police officer wants to talk with you. If you are feeling anxious this is a good time to give your wallet card to the officer. It also brings clarity to the situation for law enforcement who often mistake triggers and mannerisms from individuals with ASD for drunkenness or mental illness.

The Wallet Card® is for law enforcement as much as it is for individuals with ASD or developmental disabilities to help understand the individual better. The personalized wallet card would let law enforcement know who he/she is dealing with or what kind of reaction they may get from the individual such as why they cannot answer the officer and need to communicate with the individual a little differently.

The program expands the understanding of what to expect in a typical encounter with a police officer and when it is best to give an officer your wallet card. Here are several situations when a police officer will want to talk with you:

Traffic Stop:

An officer has observed a traffic violation or received information about the vehicle and/or the driver and initiates a traffic stop. Emergency lights flashing in the rear-view mirror could make anybody's heart race, but for people diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, getting pulled over can mean sensory overload. It is important to do the following:

- When the police officer pulls behind you and activates his vehicle emergency lights and siren, safely pull to the right side of the road and out of the way of traffic.
- Try to remain calm and relaxed.
- Keep your hands where the officer can see them.
- Do not exit your vehicle unless an officer instructs you to do so.

- Do not reach for your wallet card without asking the police officer first.
- If an officer asks you for your driver's license, proof of insurance, or registration, this would be an appropriate time to show the officer your wallet card.

Other Law Enforcement Contact:

An officer may need to talk with you because someone called the police or you may be a witness. The wallet card could provide an officer with information to get in touch with a relative, find out what kind of reaction they may get from a person to help the officer defuse any situation that may arise. In this situation it is best to do the following:

- Keep your hands where the officer can see them.
- Do not put your hands in your pockets, behind your back, or in your bag or purse.
- Face in the direction of the officer when he/she is speaking to you.
- If you are feeling anxious, this is an appropriate time to give the officer your wallet card.
- Ask the officer if it is okay to show your wallet card.



The members of the Palm Bay Police Department hope that families, citizens, and individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder see our officers as an ally and advocate when they ask us for support.

Let us know what you need from us and how we can better assist you and your family.

The Wallet Card® Project

The wallet card is personalized for everyone on the Autism spectrum. The card contains information that confirms the individual's diagnosis, common traits and symptoms such as verbal or non-verbal, overstimulated by too much direction, sensitive to touch, personal space and more. After seeing your wallet card, officers can evaluate the situation and adjust their actions accordingly.

It is available to teens and adults who are out in the community by themselves.



THE PALM BAY POLICE DEPARTMENT OFFERS AN INTERACTIVE TRAINING BETWEEN POLICE OFFICERS AND WALLET CARD HOLDERS.

FOR TRAINING DATES PLEASE CONTACT TINA HENSEL AT 321-726-5652.



Autism Awareness Vehicle Sticker
This sticker assists with interactions with law enforcement by communicating before contact with the vehicle's operator or passenger(s) that he/she has ASD and may have difficulty communicating with or understanding directions from police officers.

Autism Awareness House Sticker
This sticker provides law enforcement with some notice that individual(s) inside the home has ASD and may have difficulty communicating with or understanding directions from police officers.

This is just a sample of the stickers available with and without a written message.

Contact Sgt. Hensel for free stickers for your home and vehicle.

