

Wallet Card for Disclosure to First Responders and Law Enforcers

With thanks to Dennis Debbaudt, Mary Fox, Debby Geheran, & Steffi Geheran

An important time for a person with Asperger Syndrome (Autism Spectrum) to disclose the fact that they *have* AS is when interacting with a “first responder,” i.e. a police officer, fire fighter, or emergency medical technician. This kind of disclosure may be especially hard, because the situation may be an emergency, or one in which you feel threatened or unsafe. If you are an adult or teen with AS, we suggest that you carry a copy of the card below in your wallet at all times, to use in such difficult situations. Be sure to write on the back of the card the names and telephone numbers of two people who know you, and who explicitly agree to serve as emergency contacts for you if you ever find yourself in a difficult situation with a police officer or other first responder.

Some parents take their children to meet local police and disclose their AS *in advance* of any possible emergency. Teens and adults could also make it a point to introduce themselves to local police, perhaps taking along a family member or trusted friend to facilitate the meeting. It is far easier to establish a mutually respectful relationship at a time when everyone is calm, than in the midst of an emergency or active law enforcement incident.

The expert on these issues is **Dennis Debbaudt**, who has kindly spoken at AANE conferences and trained law enforcement personnel and other first responders in New England on behalf of our community. You can receive his e-mailed “Autism Risk and Safety” newsletter by contacting him at <ddpi@flash.net>. AANE staff members have developed this card based on models created by Dennis, and on his insights and teaching.

It is very important to ask a police officer *permission* to reach into your pocket to get your wallet and the card yourself, or tell the officer exactly where you are carrying your wallet—purse, left side coat pocket, etc.—and ask the officer to please take out the wallet and look for the card himself or herself. For example, you could say, “Officer, I have a card in my wallet that explains my disability. May I please show it to you, or would you prefer to reach into my back pocket yourself?” If you reach into your pocket suddenly, the police officer may think you are reaching for a weapon, and react in a way that could endanger you.

Directions

1. Cut out both the front and back sides of the card.
2. Fill out the front with your name, date of birth, and phone numbers of your two emergency contact people.
3. Cut a piece of card stock to the same size. Put it between the two sides of the card.
4. Laminate with contact paper or a clear lamination kit from a pharmacy, hardware, or stationery store.
5. Put the card into your wallet; carry it with you whenever you leave home.

To: A Law Enforcement Officer or other First Responder

**I have a diagnosis of *Asperger Syndrome*
a social/communication disability related to autism.**

My Name: _____

Home phone: _____ D.O.B. ____/____/____

In case of emergency, or to assist both you and me in communicating
and in resolving this situation, please contact one of the following people:

1. Name _____ Phone: _____

2. Name _____ Phone: _____



Asperger/Autism Network

617-393-3824 www.aane.org

**I have a diagnosis of *Asperger Syndrome (Autism Spectrum)*
a social/communication disability related to autism.**

Because of my Asperger's Syndrome, I may

- Panic if yelled at, and lash out if touched or physically restrained.
- Misinterpret things you tell me or ask me to do.
- Not be able to answer your questions.
- Appear not to be listening or paying attention.
- Tend to interpret statements literally.
- Appear rude or say things that sound tactless, especially when anxious or confused.
- Have difficulty making eye contact.
- Speak too loud, too soft, or with unusual intonation.

I would like to cooperate. To help me cooperate, PLEASE:

- Clearly identify yourself as a law enforcement officer/first responder.
- **Call one of my emergency contacts.** (Please see **reverse** side of this card.)
- Do **not** assume that my Asperger's traits constitute suspicious behavior.
- Avoid touching me or restraining me.
- Speak to me in normal, calm, non-confrontational tones.
- Tell me exactly what I need to do politely, clearly, simply, literally, and step by step.

