


MONROE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

General Order

CHAPTER: 032-Q		TITLE: Autism or Autism Spectrum Disorder Interviews
EFFECTIVE DATE: May 16, 2017	NO. PAGES: 2	REVIEWED/REVISED: November 29, 2022
 Sheriff of Monroe County		

- I. **PURPOSE:** This Directive applies to all Monroe County Sheriff's Office (MCSO) Deputies, Detention Deputies, and Investigators to establish policy, responsibilities and procedures for interviewing victims, witnesses, suspects or defendants diagnosed with autism or an autism spectrum disorder in compliance with F.S. §943.0439.
- II. **DISCUSSION:** Officers shall be mindful of the special needs of individuals with developmental disabilities and ensure their rights guaranteed by Florida Statute are protected. Deputies, Detention Deputies and Investigators shall assess the needs of victims, witnesses, suspects or defendants with developmental disabilities and make appropriate accommodations when necessary. Communications, behaviors, intent and ability levels of individuals with autism or autism spectrum disorder vary greatly. In some cases, the individual may have difficulties with social interaction and communication skills.
- III. **DEFINITIONS**
- A. **Autism:** A pervasive, neurologically based developmental disability of extended duration which causes severe learning, communication and behavior disorders with age of onset during infancy or childhood. Individuals with autism exhibit impairment in reciprocal social interaction, impairment in verbal and nonverbal communication and imaginative ability, and a markedly restricted repertoire of activities and interests. F.S. §393.063(5)
- B. **Developmental Disability:** A disorder or syndrome that is attributable to intellectual disability, cerebral palsy, autism, spina bifida or Prader-Willie syndrome that manifests before the age of 18 and constitutes a substantial handicap that can reasonably be expected to continue indefinitely F.S. §393.063(12)
- C. **Autism Spectrum Disorder:** Any of the following disorders as defined:
1. Autistic Disorder: social, communication and behavioral challenges
 2. Asperger's Syndrome: developmental disorder affecting ability to effectively socialize and communicate.
 3. Pervasive Developmental Disorder not otherwise specified. F.S. §627.6686(2)(b) and F.S. §641.31098(2)
- D. **Professional:** A psychiatrist, psychologist, mental health counselor, special education instructor, clinical worker or related professional. The professional must have experience treating, teaching or assisting patients or clients who have been diagnosed with autism or an autism spectrum disorder or related developmental disability or must be certified in special education with a concentration focused on persons with autism or an autism spectrum disorder. F.S. §943.0439

IV. PROCEDURE FOR REQUESTING A PROFESSIONAL

A. Criteria: When an individual, who is a victim, witness, suspect or defendant, diagnosed with autism or an autism spectrum disorder, or their parent or guardian, requests a professional be present at all interviews, the interviewing Deputy, Detention Deputy or Investigator shall take the following steps:

1. Advise the individual making the request for a professional that all expenses related to the attendance of the professional at the interview shall be borne by the requesting individual. If the individual making the request for a professional is a victim, upon conviction of the offense in which the individual is a victim, the defendant may be required to reimburse the victim for all expenses related to the attendance of the professional at the interview as part of restitution.
2. Ask the individual making the request for a professional if they have a specific professional they would like to request. If so, obtain the professional's contact information and contact them for assistance. The individual making the request for a professional may also contact the professional directly if they prefer.
3. If the individual making the request does not have a specific professional they would like to request, the interviewing Deputy, Detention Deputy, or Investigator or designee shall contact the following to seek assistance:

The Center for Autism and Related Disabilities
5665 Ponce De Leon Blvd.
Coral Gables, Florida 33124
(305) 284-6563

4. The interviewing Deputy, Detention Deputy or Investigator shall document all attempts to obtain a qualified professional for an interview.
5. If a good faith effort has been made to locate a professional without success, the interviewing Deputy, Detention Deputy, or Investigator may conduct an interview without a professional present.

V. TRAINING SCHEDULE: Deputies, Detention Deputies and Investigators employed by the Monroe County Sheriff's Office will complete initial and periodic training regarding the requirements of interviewing victims, suspects or defendants who are diagnosed with autism or autism spectrum disorder.