

BRET SACKETT

One of the biggest challenges we have of course is to discern and make that judgement between someone who may have a disability and someone who is on drugs or alcohol.

My name is Bret Sackett and I'm finishing up my 28 year career with the Sonoma County Law Enforcement, with the last 11 as police chief of the city of Sonoma. Some of the training that we've put together, at least in California, is interacting with people with disabilities is part of the basic police academy and is also required in California for ongoing professional training. So, every couple of years we have an additional update about interacting with people with disabilities. But that's the minimum, and I don't think any of us want to train to the minimum. So there are numerous nonprofit and educational institutions that provide additional training for law enforcement. I really encourage you as professionals to really train your staff and utilize these resources so that you can learn about the newest and best ways to interact with people with disabilities. I think one of the challenges we have in law enforcement is when we come on scene we're required to make judgements on very little information. So, knowing some of the signs of autism and those people who may have communication disabilities is really an important thing. One is recognizing some of the signs whether it is flapping of hands, rocking back and forth or understanding that they don't like bright lights or loud noises. Knowing that, understanding and recognizing it can put us both in a position of much greater safety.

We really encourage, whether it's parents or care providers to really try to instill to whatever level you can respect for law enforcement and how important it is to follow directions. Conversely, it's our responsibility as law enforcement and professionals to get out there and really try to meet our community. So, if you have homes for autistic adults or homes for disabilities, get out there and interact with them. Create relationships and know who they are. Of course, it's much easier in small communities, like ours, as opposed to larger communities. The more you know your community, the better we're going to be.

So, there have been several incidents I can think of that our training has been beneficial to us. One of the top of my head I can think of was when we were on a call at a local market where someone was acting out. When we got down there, it was obvious that there was quite a bit of turmoil going on inside one of the aisles. When we slowed down and kind of looked at it, we recognized that the kind of behavior that they were exhibiting was more indicative of somebody who may have a disability. We were able to slow down, clear the area, speak softly and quietly to them. Eventually, we gained enough rapport with them that we were able to address what the issues were. We located the care provider and reunited them and had a very successful outcome.

ALEXIS BRASWELL

My name is Alexis Braswell and I work at The Red Barn. The Red Barn is a therapeutic equine center that works with adults and children with special needs. We work with children with a wide variety of disabilities, many of whom have communication disorders.

The role of horses when working with children with communication disorders is that horses provide an opportunity to be a voice for that child in a situation where they might not otherwise have one.

Horses by nature are prey animals so they operate out of a fight or flight response, much like a child with a disability or communication disorder. In a stressful or scary situation, their first reaction is going to be to flee, much like some of our children when put in a stressful situation might also flee. This could in turn look like they are trying to avoid getting in trouble for something that they may or may not have done.

Horses don't communicate using words. Horses communicate non verbally, which is the same way that a lot of our children communicate. In working with the horses you have to be very aware of the signals they are giving you and how you're impacting them. You have to be in tune to them, and yourself as well. You need to be able to approach them in a quiet and controlled manner, being aware if they're asking you to stop or back off. Horses have space bubbles just like we do. Some kids with disabilities, or even people in general, have different sized space bubbles. So it might be that 10 feet away is as close as you can get. We need to be able to see those signs and respect that and say, "Okay, I can take a step back and give you the space that you need," but not interpret that space as guilt or trying to avoid them or fleeing the scene.

Before I approach a horse, the first thing I want to do is check in with myself and make sure that I am calm and not thinking about a lot of other things going on in my world. I need to be focused and in the moment. Horses force you to be present, which is very important. Once I start approaching the horse, I make sure that I approach them slowly and that I'm paying attention to any signs that they might be giving me and that I'm respecting that. If they're telling me to stop, I stop. I wait until they invite me into their space again.

I know when a horse is welcoming me or inviting me back into their space when they return back to a relaxed state. They might go from really alert or irritated that I'm approaching them to dropping their head and relaxing their eye a little bit or just turning to greet me instead.

CHERYL AND LEE HUTCHESON

Lee: My name is Lee Hutcheson and this is my mom Cheryl. She's right next to me. I have autism.

Cheryl: When we were raising Lee and trying to make him respectful of those people in authority, we unfortunately inadvertently made him afraid. We wanted to impart to him that it was extremely important that he listen and follow directions and that police officers may take it as noncompliance if he were difficult and that would cause a problem. So, in doing that we made Lee a little bit nervous. And, when Lee gets nervous, he gets very talkative, but not very coherent.

Lee: Sometimes I am dramatic as well.

Cheryl: Yes, he will be very dramatic sometimes. He doesn't follow directions very well. Directions have to be very simplistic.

Lee: In a way that I can understand in a certain way.

Cheryl: The biggest thing is that whatever you're going to do. You need to tell him what that is. If someone is going to approach him and say they need to pat him down or something like that. You would not want to touch him without letting him know what you were going to do because that would be considered invasive and something that would trigger an anxiety response.

Lee: Even if it's something that's needed to be done on normal people.

Cheryl: In our neighborhood, we've only been there a couple of years so a lot of people in the neighborhood don't really know Lee. They don't know him when he's walking around the neighborhood and people notice when there's a strange person walking around. We had a case where he texted me and said that there was a police officer driving around the neighborhood. As a mom, I thought, "Oh my gosh! Is there a problem?" Thankfully nothing came of it. But I always do wonder if the police officers have the training to pull up and say, "Hey do you live in the neighborhood?" Obviously, they are going to say that to most people, but he may not even respond. I think most of the parents here will tell you, you can almost pick most of these kids out once you've seen enough of them. They stand a certain way. They walk a certain way. It's stereotypical I guess. But, to notice those things and say, "This kid's not just ignoring me. They don't get it." If you turn that siren on. You turn the lights on. They'll go into panic mode.

SHELLEY JONES

My name is Shelley Jones and I'm a speech therapist. I have 27 years of experience as a speech therapist working with students with receptive and expressive language disorders. I am also a PATH certified therapeutic riding instructor. I come to this conversation with a unique perspective of understanding the communication needs of children and understanding how horses react in stressful situations.

Horses react when they are frightened in stressful situations by running away. When they don't understand the situation, their first reaction is a fear response. Children with communication disorders often react the same way that horses do in that perspective.

It is so interesting to me when working with students with communication disorders and how they respond is very similar to my work with horses. Students with communication disorders often don't understand what is being asked of them and they aren't able to express what they want. Horses live in that same exact world.

Children with communication disorders can often be confused with someone who is being belligerent or disrespectful or simply not obeying what you're asking them to do. If you think back to the Charlie Brown teacher that we've all seen on the cartoon where we hear the teaching sounding like, "Wa wonk, wa wonk, wa wonk." Children with receptive language disorders, particularly in a stressful situation hear language in much the same way. They literally don't understand the words that are being spoken to them. You can assume that they are unable to follow your directions.

Most have been taught the universal sign for help. The hand is held out flat, with the other hand placed on the palm, forming a fist with the thumb up. Most children will understand that you are there to help them when you give them this sign.

May I suggest that the first thing you want to do when you encounter a child is to ask them their name? First, that lets you know if they're able to understand the command. And second it lets you know if they're able to respond to you appropriately. Wait for up to 10 seconds for that response. If you ask a child their name and they do not respond appropriately, some common behaviors that you may see with children with autism would include them looking away from you, giving you no eye contact at all. They may run away from you and leave the situation. The second thing you'd want to do is ask them to follow a simple command, like "Hold up your hands and show me your fingers." You also want to wait up to 10 seconds for that child to respond. This lets you know that the child can follow your command. They may not be able to speak, but you know that they are understanding what you're saying to them.

Remember to use as little words as possible. Children with communication disorders are often confused by too many words. Speak slowly and clearly and on their level.

ERIN McINERNEY

My name is Erin McInerney and I have autism, bipolar one, and severe ADHD. It's hard for me to communicate to those when I'm nervous or scared because with my ADHD And bipolar and autism it makes my anxiety extremely high level. That impacts my ability to talk to others and they usually can't understand me as well because of my diagnosis.

If I ever need to talk to someone with authority, it would be nice of them to know that because of my diagnosis it's hard for me to know if I did the right or wrong thing because I have a hard time thinking or deciding if I did something wrong or not. Also, with knowing that, I'd like them to also know that if they were ever to approach me or someone else with special needs or mental illnesses to walk slowly and change their attitude to not scare me or anyone else. To talk slowly and softly. To try to assure me or someone else that you're not going to hurt them and everything's going to be okay. You just want to talk and ask questions.

So, approaching a horse, what you do is when you get to wherever the horse is, you walk slowly and then stop every few steps and then wait for the horse to acknowledge you. Then, make sure if they're okay to keep walking and to know when you're about to get in their personal bubble. Then, you need to back up and stop. That's kind of for me how if I was going to be approached by a police officer, then I'd like the police officer to approach me that way instead of just walking up.

When I get anxious, I stumble talking. I back up or start walking, or if it's really bad anxiety I will start walking fast, like as fast as I can. Sometimes I look guilty even if I did nothing wrong.

TEMPLE GRANDIN

I'm Temple Grandin. I'm a professor of animal science at Colorado State University. When I was a young child I had no speech until age four. I was diagnosed with autism. Autism can vary from geniuses that build things in silicon valley to somebody who maybe cannot dress themselves. Some of the basic principles is there can be sensitivity to bright lights, sensitivity to sound. But their brain is like a slow computer. It's like a phone on a single bar. When you ask them something, it takes time for that webpage to load. That's the webpage that gives them language.

When I was a little kid, people would touch me all the time and I would pull away. There's some people with autism that have a sensitivity to over react to being suddenly touched. Remember this principle, sudden surprises scare.

So, let's say there's someone with autism and you have to put the handcuffs on them, if you will just be calm and explain what you are going to do they will probably cooperate. But, if you get mad and starting doing this (shaking), the big guy with autism, nonverbal guy with autism, will probably fight you.

If you have a young child throwing a tantrum, the police aren't going to be afraid of it. The problem is when you've got an adult man having a meltdown from sensory overload. That looks really scary. People with autism and a horse are animals where a sudden surprise scares them.

Let's talk about stimming. Let's say a police officer is at a shopping center or just out on a city street and he sees someone doing this (stimming) that's stimming and people with autism do that when they get really nervous. So you see this (stimming) or maybe rocking that's stimming. They just do that to calm down. That's harmless.

There was a horrible case with a friend of mine, his son in his twenties drove and had a job. He got pulled over and froze. The police ended up breaking the window. It was a mess.

When you have difficulties in the brain, processing speed is slowed way down so maybe you freeze. Or maybe he's going to be going like this (stimming) and that's definitely a stereotype. A lot of people with autism don't do good with eye contact. He might be sitting, just looking ahead and not do eye contact.

You've got to give them time to respond. You keep clicking on stuff on your computer and it finally just freezes up and then it's not going to work. That's why the officer needs to stay calm to give them time to respond. That is one of the most important things that the officer needs to know. They are like a phone on one bar and it takes time to respond. That's true for autism, cp, stuttering, and anxiety problems.

LAURA VOGTLE

I'm Laura Vogtle. I'm an occupational therapist. I've worked with children with disabilities for about 35 years. I'm on faculty at the University of Alabama in Birmingham in the occupational therapy department. My specialty area has always been children and adults with cerebral palsy. So CP is a condition that occurs before, during, or soon after birth. It displays itself as a disability of movement, so

these children don't move the same as typically developing children. It also is a problem of postural control, so some of these children can't hold themselves upright. They can't hold their head up. There are many associated conditions that occur with cerebral palsy. Some of those can be problems talking. Sometimes they can have problems seeing and hearing. Sometimes they have intellectual disabilities.

Somebody with cerebral palsy may walk differently. They may lurch from one side to the other. They may stumble, a lot. They may walk with a pronounced limp. So that one leg moves more than the other leg. Their arms may be held up in what we call a high guard position. They can have one arm tightly by their side and the other moving. Depending on the level of their motor impairments. When they talk they may be difficult to understand. Some of these children are in wheelchairs.

Sometimes the motor impairments and speech impairments of a person with cp can cause their behavior to be misinterpreted as something else. Because of that and because of the slow speed of response sometimes that you see in children who have this disability, people assume that they are slow to respond because they don't understand and that's not always the case.

JAN ROWE

I'm Dr. Jan Rowe and I'm the coordinator of the Tourette Syndrome and Tic Disorders program of Children's of Alabama. I'm also the co-director for the Center for Excellence for UAB and Children's of Alabama. I'm an occupational therapist, and I have a specialty in Tourette Syndrome. The diagnosis of TS is when a person has two motor tics and one vocal tic that have persisted past a year. The onset of those tics is before the age of 18. A tic disorder, which is the larger umbrella that everything falls under, is when one a person has only motor tics or only vocal tics, but they don't have a combination of the two. Vocal tics, sometimes known as phonic tics, are sounds that you make, again, that you don't necessarily want to make. So it can be something as simple as a throat clear or clicking sound or it could be stating words or phrases.

Sometimes even cuss words or rude and socially inappropriate kinds of comments as well. Those kinds of statements are referred to as coprolalia. Coprolalia, which is the most known tic, is that tic (that vocal tic) that happens when people cuss or say obscene things or make rude statements or socially inappropriately types of statements. It's actually one of the rarest tics that there are. It happens in less than 10% of the Tourette or tic population. So that you understand how large that population is: one is 100 people have tic disorder or Tourette syndrome. So, it's important for people to understand that while this is a rare tic, it can still happen and does still happen. Something that can happen with people who have Tourette syndrome, especially if they have coprolalia, is that in predicaments where they are feeling threatened, they say the very thing they know they are not supposed to say. So, for instance, when they are in airports the very thing that they say is, "I have a bomb," or "I'm a terrorist." They know that is the very thing they shouldn't say and it's the very thing they've been extremely fearful about on their entire ride to the airport and with every step that they take through the airport. Especially as they approach TSA security. So, when they see you as a police officer and worry that they

might tic in front of you, the only thing that does is escalate their anxiety about that tic and you are absolutely going to see and hear every tic they have. And it can look crazy and it can sound crazy.

JAYCEE DUGARD AND REBECCA BAILEY

Jay: I'm Jaycee Dugard and I'm the founder and president of the JAYC Foundation.

Rebecca: I'm Doctor Rebecca Baily and I'm a psychologist on the advisory board for the JAYC Foundation. Together Jaycee and I created the LEO program which stands for law enforcement training program.

Jay: I created the JAYC Foundation when I was recovered in 2009. I really wanted to give back when working with Rebecca and what she did with horses. I really wanted to give that same kind of feeling that my family had in our reunification process. So we created the JAYC Foundation to give back to other families that needed a safe place to come after a trauma, after a kidnapping, after a murder, any kind of traumatic experience. The law enforcement program came when we were talking and we really wanted to use my story as a way to give officers a better understanding of their job. When I was first approached when I was found it was really hard because it felt very aggressive. And I didn't know how to respond. I didn't know how to use my voice. And so they thought that I wasn't being cooperative.

I really couldn't speak at all. I wonder if the officer just knew to back off just a little bit. There was a female officer that came in and instead of trying to tell me I'd done something wrong and that I was in trouble and that my kids were going to be taken away from me. She said, "You know what Everything is going to be okay. We'll figure this out. Why don't you just sit down." I said, "I can't but I can write it down." That was something that worked for me. There's been times with the horses that I realized in the way I approached them really means a lot. I have those aha moments.

Rebecca: It's really important what we also encourage law enforcement and ourselves to do is take a moment when you're in a safe situation and asses what's in front of you. So, for example, we have a horse that when you want her to maybe step back one or two steps you have to understand her language and her langue is be clear, be strong, but don't be too strong. You do too strong and it's going to fluster her. So, also when we do this around the country with other people's horses we find that this is a universal message that horses can teach people. So we use this particular exercise to remind people particularly in in law enforcement to take a second and try to assess what the language of this person is In front of you. When you know there's not a threat. What might happen is if you come in with too much energy, force, too loud a voice to get her to stand back you might get a horse that gets very frazzled. And says I don't know what you want right now. And then, the goal of having her take three simple steps back is gone. We really feel that when we work with horses that this is a great way to get law enforcement to see that. If your goal is resolution of the problem or resolution of the situation you want to take a moment to see what effect a voice might have, a gesture might have, and sometimes we forget that in our hurry to do a job quickly and get it done.

What I learned, and my team members learned, from Jaycee and her family was the importance of having a more organic experience in order to understand what they've been through and also to support awareness and the environment. When we first created the LEO the intention was to use her story to teach others, but what we began to find out with many law enforcement officers is they use the same approach in different situations with different types of victims of crimes. We began to say, "Well, how can we create an enjoyable fun program that can really bring home the message of adjusting your approach to the individual that's in front of you?"

Psychologists are really big on acronyms. What we found is that law enforcement is too. So we sat down with the folks at The Red Barn and we thought okay what can we use to explain the message of our program and came up the acronym HORSE, which stands for.

Jay: H stands for help. When you're approaching somebody you want to give the impression that you're helping them instead of being forceful. At least in my case they were a little bit too forceful and I felt that I couldn't talk to them. O is for observe. You want to tune in to their surroundings and your surroundings and what's going on. What could be causing their behavior. And then there's R.

Rebecca: R is one of my personal favorites. R stands for respect. Respect each other and respect the space. Very important working with communication disorders for a variety of reasons. S is a tough one for many of us. S is slow down. We have a little horse here, a miniature horse who teaches this better than human being possibly. If you walk up to this little guy quickly, he's off like a bat. So, it's really important to understand as a law enforcement officer what can come up with the need to slow down sometimes. So, if you're assessing the safety situation and you know you're safe, slowing down can let you solve the problem, get to the point, protect the person way better than if you act quickly.

Jay: And, E is for expect. Expect that you're going to get a good outcome. Expect that you can work it out and that you can work it out and have a positive outcome.

Rebecca: I think that's something we learned a lot working with different law enforcement agencies around the country is how much the expectation is sometimes for a negative outcome. There's so much difficulty that you all are dealing with right now with negative folks coming at you. And sometimes what we learned is when you get into a situation that may come out with a good outcome that you're not necessarily like what happened the day before. So we learn with horses that emotions are contagious. You walk into a situation expecting negativity that you may get negativity back. You come in expecting a positive outcome, you may get positive back.

In the field of psychology there's a lot of focus right now on what they call mindfulness. What we refer to as mindfulness is just taking a moment to be aware of your surroundings to be aware of yourself. To be aware of the person in front of you. Really, honestly sometimes that just takes taking a deep, deep breath. Slowing down, breathing a couple deep breaths before you react. Again, for law enforcement, this can be counter intuitive. Because often you are in a situation that's a threat. I'm talking about communication disorders. We're not talking about people that are a threat to you. Primarily the threat is a situation that gets out of control and there's a difficulty in resolution because there's a miscommunication in understanding.

Jay: We are so thankful that we received this grant from the American Legion Child and Welfare Foundation. We partnered with The Red Barn Foundation to create this project in the hopes that it will really do some good and positive outcomes will come from this.

Rebecca: What we're hoping to do is help create a situation where families and law enforcement are better equipped to problem solve some of these scenarios that we see. In addition to this training that we are providing for all of you, The Red Barn is also helping create one for families. So, we're seeing this as a collaborative process between families with communication disorder and law enforcement because we know together we can be much more effective in helping each other. We're finding a lot of positive for many reasons. One reason is we remind them yet again who these programs are really about and who law enforcement is really about. Helping people that need to be helped. That's one piece of it. The other thing we're doing when we use a horse is we have a lot of fun. Often law enforcements comes in the morning and they're like who are these crazy horse people. And by the end of the day we have a lot of smiling, a lot of connection, and a lot of appreciation from both sides.