

# Autism Spectrum Disorder: NETWORK NEWS

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## TERRITORIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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### CONTENTS:

**TERRITORIAL  
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT  
FEATURE ARTICLE:  
ASD & LAW**

1,2

**CHECK THIS OUT**

2

**TEACHER TIP  
READ ALL ABOUT IT**

3

**WATCH THIS  
COE-ASD EVENT:  
FUNDAMENTALS OF  
STRUCTURED  
TEACHING  
TRAINING**

4

**WEBSITES &  
REFERENCES  
ASD TEAM MEMBERS**

5

## ASD & Law

Interactions between autistic individuals and law enforcement can be problematic as the social-cognition challenges and low anxiety threshold of many ASD students combined with the sometimes limited experience of police in communicating with neurodiverse individuals creates misunderstandings and tension that can complicate inherently stressful situations. Examination of the research that has been completed suggests that this communication problem warrants greater consideration. Reflective of the ill-effects of ineffective communication between individuals with ASD and law enforcement is a recent study by Salerno & Schuller (2019) who found that 78% of respondents with ASD reported feeling afraid during interactions with police, with more than 60% categorizing their experiences as traumatic<sup>1</sup>. Similarly, Tint et al. (2017) reported that many individuals with ASD feel that law enforcement officials often misunderstand their intentions/needs with the result that their behavior is misperceived as dangerous.<sup>2</sup> To the untrained eye, common autistic characteristics such as looking away, *stimming*, and/or not responding verbally can seem like defiance, and an overly strong reaction to sensory triggers (e.g., sirens, loud voices, slamming car doors) can be mistakenly viewed as an indication of an increasingly dysregulated emotional state and/or as a precursor to dangerous behaviour.<sup>3</sup>

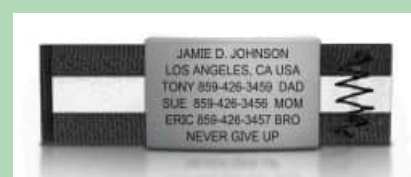
Despite the evidence that communication between individuals with ASD and the police can be problematic at times, it is important to note that law enforcement agencies are both aware of and in the process of addressing this issue. In fact, in many jurisdictions across the USA, workshops are offered to police departments that highlight how common characteristics of autism can manifest in stressful situations and delineate more effective ways of engaging

with autistic people<sup>4</sup>. Similarly, in Canada, formal training programs that both emphasize the importance of recognizing traits of autism and teach how to implement tailored intervention strategies are available for first-line responders<sup>5</sup>. For example, the city of Toronto has adopted a strategy whereby parents and caregivers can include their autistic child's names on the *Police Vulnerable Persons Registry*; a database where additional information is stored and accessible to professionals called to intervene in problematic situations<sup>3</sup>. While no research has yet been completed to address the efficacy of these strategies, anecdotal reports from autistic adults appear to indicate that increased education and awareness among police officers is leading to improvements in communication between law enforcement and individuals with ASD.<sup>1</sup>

## CHECK THIS OUT



Organization for Autism Research is a comprehensive website that attempts to use science to address the social, educational, and treatment concerns of autistic individuals, their parents, caregivers, and the professionals working with them. **Autism and Law Enforcement: Strategies for Safer Interactions** provides plans of action to assist individuals with autism when faced with situations involving law enforcement.<sup>6</sup> The authors of this article, Debbaudt, Sreckovic, and Kenney (2022), provide tips and tools to help autistic individuals, their families, and police officers safely navigate volatile points of intersection among them. They also recommend the safety alert card that includes a link to an identification bracelet called the Sport Pin-Tuck ID. These items are designed to help police officers better understand who they are dealing with and how to communicate with them in the most effective way. Ensuring that police have additional information about the individual in front of them (i.e., the bracelet) and that they are more aware of the social-communication and anxiety-regulation limitations of individuals with ASD can help to create a better sense of safety and understanding among officers and individuals in high alert situations.





## TEACHER TIP: EMPOWER YOUR STUDENTS WITH A SELF-ADVOCACY CARD



Empower your students with ASD by giving them a support card for any interaction with police! This card can provide essential information like their diagnosis, preferred communication style (e.g., direct and calm voice, use of visuals), and an emergency contact. You can personalize it to your student's age and needs. It is a simple yet powerful tool to help ensure that ASD students are better understood and supported in any situation! Here are some examples:

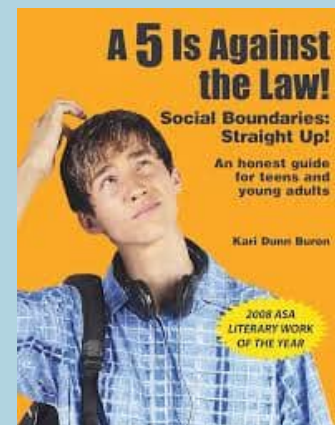


## READ ALL ABOUT IT

Two main challenges experienced by autistic students are understanding social boundaries and how to behave appropriately in complex social situations. These interpersonal difficulties become more of an issue as students reach their teen and young adult years and now must navigate situations that could have legal implications. Kari Dunn Buron's ***A 5 Is Against the Law*** is a practical guide for individuals with ASD and their caregivers that provides clear guidance on how to evaluate and regulate behaviour in these types of complex scenarios. Highlights include how to:

1. Use a "5-point scale" as a foundation for teaching these skills;
2. Help students understand and manage one's feelings and reactions to prevent dysregulation;
3. Use real-world examples to teach students what behaviours are acceptable in different situations and how violating personal boundaries can lead to major consequences (e.g., legal trouble, damaged relationships);
4. Use practical worksheets and skill building exercises to help students practice identifying and implementing appropriate social behaviours in various scenarios.

This book is available in the ASD Resource Library and can be borrowed by contacting Lisa Mancini at [ldavis@lbpsb.qc.ca](mailto:ldavis@lbpsb.qc.ca).



# WATCH THIS

*Atypical* is a coming-of-age dramedy that centers on Sam Gardner, an 18-year-old with ASD, as he navigates life, love, and independence. The show explores Sam's challenges with social interactions and relationships along with his desire for greater autonomy while highlighting the impact of his atypicality on his family.



In Season 2, Episode 6 titled "In the Dragon's Lair", Sam plans to have a sleepover at his friend Zahid's house to practice for the graduating class *lock-in night*. Sam is unable to sleep and goes out for a walk late in the evening. A police officer attempts to stop him but Sam does not understand the situation and continues walking with the result that he is arrested and brought to the police station. This very stressful incident inspires Sam's parents to take action regarding members of law enforcement and their lack of training with individuals with autism and other disabilities. In subsequent episodes, they do a number of things to raise awareness and ensure better support for people with ASD when confronted by situations similar to Sam's.

*Atypical* is an authentic, heartwarming, and often laugh-out-loud look at growing up, family dynamics, and navigating life on the autism spectrum. Sam Gardner's journey towards independence, self-acceptance, and love is both relatable and eye-opening, it will make you think, smile, and feel deeply.

**Warning: Atypical contains mature subject matter and is intended for mature audiences.**

## FUNDAMENTALS OF STRUCTURED TEACCHING TRAINING



### Overview:

- It is a 3 day in-person training
- It provides participants with an overview of the learning styles of autism and Structured TEACCHing
- It teaches antecedent-based behavior management strategies using Structured TEACCHing principles
- It includes presentations, videos, interactive discussions based on case studies and small group activities
- It is a strong foundational training, but does not meet the prerequisites for TEACCH Professional Certification


### Objectives:


Upon completion of this training, the participant will be able to:


- Identify learning styles of individuals on the autism spectrum
- Design the physical organization of learning spaces
- Develop individualized schedules and work systems
- Develop meaningful visual structure that promotes independence with educational, leisure and daily living activities
- Implement an antecedent-based behavior problem solving approach to engage students in the expected behavior


### Target Audience:

This course is designed for educators, psychologists, speech language pathologists, as well as others interested in educational strategies for school-aged children on the autism spectrum.

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# ASD TEAM MEMBERS

## JACALYN ARMSTRONG

Consultant for Inclusive Education

## PATRICIA ASSOUAD

Consultant for Autism

## Dr. ANDREW BENNETT

Coordinator/Psychologist

## Dr. PATTY CLORAN

Coordinator/Consultant for Autism

## KATIE COHENE, PhD

Coordinator/Consultant for Autism

## SASHA DESMARAIS-ZALOB

Consultant for Autism

## OLIVIA DI MARINO

Occupational Therapist

## DATEVIG ETYEMEZIAN

Consultant for Autism

## JADE LAWSANE

Consultant for Autism

## LISA MANCINI

Consultant for Autism

## HELENE PACKMAN

Speech & Language Pathologist

## ANITA PERNO

Consultant for Autism

## EITHNE SHEERAN

Consultant for Autism

## CARLING TESTER

Consultant for Autism

## REFERENCES & WEBSITES



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- 3) <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/autism-police-study-camh-1.4158684>
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