

SANTA ANA POLICE DEPARTMENT

DAVID VALENTIN · CHIEF OF POLICE

TRAINING BULLETIN

"Education promotes professional and responsive law enforcement"

Interacting with People with a Physical Disability-Suggestions for Police Personnel

Purpose

The purpose of this bulletin is to provide information regarding available resources which may be used by police personnel when interacting with individuals who have physical disabilities.

Introduction

Occasionally, police personnel will contact physically disabled, developmentally disabled, visually or hearing impaired, or wheelchair bound individuals. Regardless of the type of interaction, the Americans with Disability Act of 1990 prohibits state and local government from discriminating against those with a disability. The information provided in this bulletin will assist police personnel on how to aid these individuals and what resources are available for their use.

I. Aiding the Visually Impaired

If a blind or visually-impaired person needs assistance, identify yourself and offer to help. Speak directly to the individual and give clear directions as to what they are to do or where they are to go. Do not shout. Do not avoid the words "look" and "see," as there are no reasonable substitutes. Always describe the actions that will be taken before they occur. If guiding more than one visually impaired person, ask that they hold each other's hands. Once outside the danger area, ensure they are not simply abandoned, but instead are led to a place of safety. When leaving, tell the person(s) you are leaving.

A guide dog is responsible for its master's safety; do not pet or otherwise distract the animal. If the guide dog is wearing a harness, it is on duty. If you do not want the dog to guide the owner, the owner should remove the harness.

To guide a blind person, let him/her take your elbow and follow the motion of your body. Walk about one half-step ahead and identify steps, curbs, or other obstacles as you approach them. Pause briefly at steps or curbs. Go up or down stairs one step ahead of the person being guided. In areas too narrow for walking two abreast, tell him/her about the situation and reinforce that the blind person should get behind you by bending your arm backward so your hand is partly behind your back. This position, when held, extends your elbow behind you and automatically puts the person being guided more directly behind you. If

circumstances make such a position impractical, improvise by having the blind person hold your shoulder.

II. Wheelchair Users Assistance Techniques

If a wheelchair user needs assistance, he or she will tell you what actions will be most helpful for them. They may be able to transfer themselves to a car or piece of furniture with little or no assistance, but you cannot assume their mobility level until you have spoken to them. Persons in wheelchairs may be paralyzed in different parts of the body, which can result in lost pain perception. During a rescue or emergency scenario they may be unaware that they are seriously injured.

If you need to converse with a wheelchair user for more than a few minutes, sit down at their eye level. It is uncomfortable for a seated person to look up for long periods of time.

If you are going to assist the wheelchair user, remember to keep your toes from under the wheels of the chair. It is easier for you to stand back than for the person in the chair to dodge or go by you. Wheelchairs cannot move sideways.

Remember, in a rescue or evacuation situation, if at all possible, do not abandon the wheelchair. The user's mobility depends upon its availability.

III. Aiding the Hearing Impaired

Police personnel can expect to come into contact with people who are deaf or hearing impaired. As representatives of the community, police personnel must understand that their communication with the hearing impaired must be just as effective as their communication with hearing individuals.

During contact, police personnel are responsible for ensuring the hearing impaired individual understands what is being communicated. Conversely, police personnel need to ensure they understand what the hearing impaired individual is communicating to them. There are a number of techniques police personnel may use to ensure communication is taking place:

1. Use of a qualified sign language or oral interpreter
2. Speaking loudly and clearly, and the use of assistive listening devices (*to amplify sound*)
3. Use of gestures or visual aids to supplement oral communication
4. An exchange of written notes
5. The use of a computer or typewriter
6. The use of a text telephone/teletype (TTY) device (**Note:** A TTY phone is attached to payphone in the Police Department lobby)

When deciding which method of communication to use, police personnel should give primary consideration to the individual's preference. Honor that preference unless it would significantly interfere with law enforcement's safety, duties or responsibilities.

If police personnel at the scene determines that the hearing impaired individual requires an oral or sign language interpreter, one needs to consider the length, importance, and complexity of the communication as well as the context. If the legality of a conversation will be questioned in court, such as where Miranda warnings are issued, a sign language interpreter may be necessary. Police personnel should be careful about misunderstandings in the absence of a qualified interpreter. A nod of the head may be an attempt to appear cooperative, rather than consent or a confession of wrongdoing.

In the event that a qualified interpreter is going to be used, police personnel should contact his or her immediate supervisor to obtain approval. Once approval is granted, a local sign language interpreter can be called to respond and assist.

IV. Contact Numbers for Local Sign Language Interpreters:

The City currently uses LINKS Sign Language Interpreter Service:

Mon-Fri from 8 am to 5 pm: (888) 742-0070 or (562) 331-0927

After hours/Weekends/Holidays: (562) 331-0927

FAX: (562) 436-5559

Website: <http://www.linksinterpreting.com/>

For additional information regarding the Americans with Disabilities Act, you may contact the Personnel Services Department at (714) 647-5340.

Summary

People with physical disabilities should be treated with the same respect as those who do not have disabilities. This Training Bulletin will enable police personnel to aid those with physical disabilities in a professional and efficient manner.

Acknowledgment: This Training Bulletin was prepared by the Santa Ana Police Department Training Section, A.H., 5/92.

Revised by: Cpl. J. Gonzalez, and Jocelyn Tingley

Revision Date: May 2007

Revised by: Cpl. J. Gonzalez, and Jocelyn Tingley

Revision Date: August 2008