**Communicating Effectively and Professionally with People in Custody Who Have Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities:**

**Tips for PREA Situations**

* **Intellectual:** a neurodevelopmental condition that develops before age 22, like Down syndrome or fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. It is characterized by significant limitations in both intellectual functioning (e.g., ability to learn and reason) and adaptive behavior (e.g., ability to understand and follow rules).
* **Developmental:** a broad term that describes a group of conditions that affect a person’s physical, intellectual, and/or behavioral functioning. Developmental disabilities begin during childhood, like autism or cerebral palsy.

**What is an intellectual or developmental disability (IDD)?**

**What are some IDD-related behaviors that might be misinterpreted as defiant, disobedient, or untrustworthy in a custody setting?**

* Slow processing of questions or commands.
* “Meltdowns” or agitation related to sensory overload.
* Slurred speech or verbal tics.
* Difficulty walking or atypical gait.
* Forgetful and requiring regular reminders to complete tasks.
* Difficulty making eye contact or making too much eye contact.
* Easily distracted.
* Difficulty with time and remembering events in chronological order.
* Difficulty with verbal communication.

**What should I do if I suspect someone has an intellectual or developmental disability?**

**When Giving Instructions:**

* Explain what you are doing, why, and how long it will take.
* Use clear, concrete words.
* Check for understanding: ask for a verbal response or gesture that indicates understanding (e.g., a nod).
* Use pictorial aids if you have them.
* Ask if they need any extra help to understand your instructions.

**When Asking Questions:**

* Use everyday words and avoid jargon.
* Speak slowly and offer to repeat questions.
* Ask questions one at a time.

**When Interacting In-Person:**

* Use body language that indicates you are not a threat (e.g., showing your hands with your palms up).
* If possible, use quiet, low sensory spaces. For example, go to a quiet area with fewer people and distractions.
* If not possible, strive to have a low sensory space available on an “as needed” basis for people struggling with sensory overload.
* Give people extra time to process information and ask questions.

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**What should I know about people with IDD and PREA?**

* People with IDD may not know basic facts about sexual acts and sexual abuse, making it difficult for them to understand PREA education, their rights, and how to get help.
* They may not be able to understand the rules or the implied authority structure of a custody setting, making compliance difficult.
* They may form associations with unsafe people and be targeted for abuse and harassment.
* People with IDD may report that something is wrong, or something happened, but struggle to use the typical words and language of sexual abuse. They may talk in a scattered or disjointed way.

**Putting It Into Practice**

Officer Smith is getting ready to do a pat search. He sees that Resident Jones is not making eye contact and flinches away when Officer Smith moves to touch Resident Jones. What should Officer Smith do next?

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| Badge Cross with solid fill | Officer Smith decides Resident Jones is being defiant and, in frustration, abruptly begins the search. Resident Jones becomes upset, flails his arms, and hits Officer Smith by accident. Officer Smith uses force to restrain Resident Jones and writes him up for failure to obey an order and assaulting an officer. |
| Badge Tick1 with solid fill | Officer Smith realizes that something is off. He pauses and explains that he needs to conduct a pat search. He tells Resident Jones what he will do, where he will touch him, and how long it will take. He asks: Do you understand? Resident Jones nods and remains still as Officer Smith completes the search. |