FACILITATING INDEPENDENCE

Strategies for staying safe in the community

Lucinda Nolan
Deputy Commissioner, Victoria Police
Long Suffering Mother
Many police care for someone with an intellectual disability too – myself included.

Research shows that police see responding to people with an ID as ‘real police work’.
What brings people with an ID to police notice

Some of the characteristics of intellectual disability can bring people with an intellectual disability to police notice, such as:

- Poor communication and reasoning skills
- Lack of awareness of social norms / socially appropriate behaviour
- Learning and developmental delays
- Challenging behaviour
- Social naivety
- Obsessive behaviour
- Black and white thinking
- Fear of police
How these characteristics impact policing

Identification
- Police encounter the spectrum of disabilities and their impacts
- The disability is not always apparent, relevant or the primary issue

Understanding
- Standard approaches may exacerbate behaviours / triggers
- Fear of police can hinder interactions

Response
- Police must balance multiple obligations
- Expert information can be difficult to access
- Tailored approaches are needed to ensure access and equality
Specific interactions involving autism

The most common interactions between police and people with ASD are for:

- Absconding
- Family violence
- Victimisation/Offending
- Cyber behaviour

There are specific strategies for police, parents and carers for each of these interactions.
Absconding – the facts and figures

Absconding = deliberate / intentional running away

When reported to police, it becomes a missing person investigation.

In 2012-13:

There were 8,528 missing person reports.

In 2,865 of these reports (33.5%), intellectual disability / mental illness was identified as a risk factor.

Of these reports, 824 (28.7%) were for a child under 18 years.
A TEAM effort between police, SES crews and the community helped to locate a 14-year-old Strathfieldsaye boy yesterday who had been missing for almost 13 hours.

Brandon Norton, who has autism, was reported missing from his Sullivans Road home at 11.30pm on Tuesday.

Police found the teenager in the yard of a nearby property at 12.15pm on Wednesday.

Channel Nine News reported a neighbour found Brandon kicking a ball on the wall of a tennis court about 11am.

Bendigo Police Detective Senior Sergeant Grant Morris said the boy was found safe and uninjured.

"He was found safe and well," he said.

"His family were relieved he was found safe."

Detective Senior Sergeant Morris said the teenager had decided to go for a walk on Tuesday and was last seen travelling along Sullivans Road.

He said Brandon had been known to wander from his home and had done so in the past.

"He has been known to do this in the past and known to walk quite some distance," he said.

"In the past he has made his way all the way into Bendigo - that's quite a walk."

Detective Senior Sergeant Morris said 15 police officers, 12 SES crews, a helicopter and DEPI staff had helped search for the teenager.

"It was very much a combined effort," he said.

"It was a good effort."

POLICE found a missing Strathfieldsaye autistic teenager safe and well on Wednesday.

Brandon Norton, 14, was found kicking a ball into his neighbour's tennis court wall after being reported missing for about 13 hours.

Step-mother Kay Norton said Brandon often walked as a method to relieve his stress or anxiety.

"Brandon has autism and he lets everything build up. He doesn't know how to express his feelings. When everything just builds up, he gets into his head that he needs to get away," she said.

Ms Norton said Brandon last went missing about a year ago, again, to deal with his anxiety.

Neighbour Margaret Keech saw Brandon from her house window before going to speak to him.

Ms Keech said he appeared to be returning home when he was located on her Sullivans Road property.

The youth was found wearing the same clothes, a Western Bulldogs jumper and trackpants, he left in.

State Emergency Service members also helped police in their search effort.
Ask for:

- the person’s full name, date of birth and address
- a description of their physical appearance, what they were wearing, a recent photo
- any health considerations or vulnerability
- the circumstances surrounding their disappearance
- features that may influence how police approach the person
- their mobility
- any steps the family has taken
- their interests
- whether they pose a risk to themselves or others

Determine the appropriate steps to take, including making a public appeal.

Prioritise searches for children and people with a disability.

Actively search until the person is found – so it is important to notify police if you subsequently have contact with or locate the missing person.
Absconders - what parents/carers can do

Identify the pattern of absconding
  When does it happen?
  How does it happen?
  Where do they go?
  What do they do?

Identify environmental changes
  Adjustments to home
  Adjustments to routines / activities

Identify behavioural interventions
  Develop help-seeking strategies
  Consider tracking devices
  Consider identification options

Volunteer information to help police respond
  Typical behaviours / triggers
  Effective communication strategies
  Known risks
  Contact person

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERSON WARNING FLAG</th>
<th>PERSON DETAILS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FAMILY NAME</td>
<td>MINI No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAME</td>
<td>1st Name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOB</td>
<td>2nd Name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex: Male □ Female □</td>
<td>Appearance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STREET No.</td>
<td>Street Name &amp; Type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOWN / SUBURB</td>
<td>State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POSTCODE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE OF WARNING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carries firearm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide / Self Injury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Custody Risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Condition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vexatious Complainant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WARNING DETAILS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Include a summary of the circumstances giving rise to this / these warning(s) date, time, type of weapon/firearm, method of suicide attempt, extent of injury, full details of other identity used including MIN number if known. Attach any documents which support your request. This form must be submitted at the end of the shift.

Typical behaviours and triggers:

Effective communication strategies:

Contact persons:

Known Risks:

Other mental health-related information (e.g., subject to a Community Treatment Order):

Source of the information:

Have advised the person of how their health information will be stored and used - 18, Health Records Act 2001

REPORT DETAILS

REPORT DATE

MEMBER NAME

SURNAME

RANK NO.

CONTACT PHONE NO.

SUB OFFICER'S APPROVAL

I am satisfied that the information provided in this report shows that the person described above meets the indicated 'Person Warning Flag' category as defined in 'VPS 103.6'.
Family violence – what police will do

Police can respond in a variety of ways, based on:

- The situation they encounter
- The information available
- Expert advice
- Policy and legislation

Responses can include:

- Assessing risks and providing advice on how to reduce them
- Intervening early and at the lowest appropriate level
- Referring to other services
- Acting on serious risks and harm
CASE STUDY 1

Police called to a 13 year old boy damaging property in the home and assaulting his mother.

Police had been called to attend on previous occasions.

The family and the support service wanted police intervention, fearing the violence and destruction will escalate.

Police spoke with the boy at length about consequences in terms that he would understand.

His parents later wrote to the police, saying: *His change has been instantaneous right after you left. You are a major catalyst of change in this chapter of his life. [He] is excited about your invitation extended to his class to visit your station.*
Family violence - what parents/carers can do

Talk to us
Contact your local police station to:
- discuss issues and options
- seek advice from our disability, youth or family violence liaison officers
- arrange a familiarisation visit

Provide background information
  e.g. typical behaviours, triggers, effective communication strategies, contact person
  Used by police to inform our responses.
  Only a parent, guardian or person with a disability aged 18 years+ can volunteer info.

Be prepared and proactive
  Identify triggers / risk factors and try to reduce / remove them
  Seek advice on any changes / situations that concern you
  Work out how you would respond to different scenarios

Seek help when necessary
  Do not hesitate to call police or other services - call 000 if urgent.
People with an intellectual disability are over-represented as victims

Supported by local and international research, *e.g. Beyond Doubt report*
Characteristics can increase vulnerability
Most common crimes – robbery, theft, assault, sexual assault

Crimes involving people with an intellectual disability are under-reported

Supported by local and international research
Characteristics can impact reporting
Crime types can impact reporting, *e.g. sexual assaults under-reported in general*
Justice system requirements can create additional barriers
Police hunt youths after abuse

Man shaken by street attack

PATRICK BYRNE

BALLARAT police are on the hunt for two male youths who have left a young autistic man fearing for his safety after they tried to assault and rob him on Monday night.

Chris Dale, 22, had been withdrawing money from an ATM in Little Bridge Street about 7.15pm on Monday when he noticed the two males, believed to be about 14, watching him.

What followed was a frightening encounter in which the teenagers followed Mr Dale into the Coles supermarket in Peel Street before getting off his bus and continuing to abuse him.

“They just kept asking for the money which I had taken out,” said a shaken Mr Dale, who returned to Little Bridge Street on Thursday.

“I eventually thought I’d lost them, but then I saw them get on my bus at the last minute. He said the pair continued to goad him on the bus, with one of the teenagers egging the other on to assault Mr Dale.

Getting off the bus near his home in Delacombe, Mr Dale said the two males followed him before grabbing him by his jumper.

“They grabbed onto my jumper and wouldn’t let go ... I had to squirm out of it and run,” he said.

“I was yelling at them and they ran off.”

Mr Dale said the pair stole his jumper and cigarettes that he had earlier bought for his mother.

Police later found the jumper and cigarettes dumped in a Delacombe street.

Mr Dale said he was fearful of the pair and believed they would strike again.

His mother, Michelle Tait, said the incident was “sickening”.

“He should be able to walk the streets and feel safe,” Ms Tait said.

“This just can’t keep happening.”

Ballarat police are investigating. No arrests have been made.

patrick.byrne@fairfaxmedia.com.au

Ballarat Courier, 16 May 2014
What parents/carers can do

Reinforce personal safety messages – repeatedly!
Identify personal vulnerabilities and develop preventative strategies
Discuss potentially risky scenarios and good responses

Explain inappropriate / harmful behaviour
Ensure they know what is right / appropriate
Encourage reporting of bullying / victimisation

Instil positive views of police and other safety guardians
Engage with local police to build trust and confidence
Identify other people to approach for help / support

Assist police to provide informed responses
Consider providing information for a Person Warning Flag / response plan
Develop non-verbal ways to communicate that they have a disability
Cyber Safety – key issues and behaviours

**Issues**
- Young people’s online behaviour
- Cyber bullying
- Sexting
- Online grooming and unwanted attention
- Online privacy and digital footprints

**Negative behaviours**
- Repeated insults
- Pranks and threats
- Personal image/media sharing
- Rumours and personal information
- Defamation and identity theft
- Masquerading
- Hate/voting/rating sites
- Sexually explicit/offensive images
Cyber safety - Prevention

- **Talk openly** with your children about cyber issues and risks
- **Be aware** of what they are doing and who they are talking to online
- Keep **personal information** private
- Work out strategies for **potential issues** together
- Let them know that you will **support them**
- Ensure that they are using **age-appropriate services** and that they are able to block and report unwanted contact
- Encourage them to **think** before they post
- Discuss **ethical sexual relationships**
- Promote **empathy** and looking at situations from other people’s perspectives
- Educate on the potential dangers of **accepting strangers** as friends
- Teach and encourage them to **block and report** if anyone makes them feel unsure or uncomfortable
- Support them to deal with **inappropriate conversations** that may happen online
- Increase **your own awareness** of online activities
Tips for preventing incidents

- Ensure that computers and devices are used under **supervision** and outside of bedrooms at all times – including gaming devices
- Consider the use of **family agreements** to support safe practice
- Place Wi-Fi modems on **automatic timers** and consider access rights
- Consider using **filtering** or monitoring software
- Use appropriate **privacy settings** and parental controls
- Keep anti-virus, **security** and firewall software enabled/up to date
- Make sure their **profiles are set to private**
- Regularly **search** for themselves on line
- Report **fake profiles**
- Do not join offensive online groups or “**like**” offensive online content
- **Disable location services** on mobile devices
- Stress that they do not take, accept or forward **nude images of someone under 18 yrs.**
Responding to incidents

- Keep **calm**
- **Talk** to your child about the issue
- Try to **find out** where it happened, who else is involved and where images or content is located
- Make contact/an appointment with the **school** (if required) – particularly if those involved are from the same school
- Advise not to respond to hurtful communication, other than **STOP**
- **Block** unwanted content
- **Keep** the evidence
- **Police** may need to be involved
- **Contact** the site administrators to report
- Seek **professional help** is your child is distressed
All parents want their child to be happy, healthy, confident and independent.

Parents of children with intellectual disabilities face specific challenges.

But not alone.

Professionals such as police are improving their understanding and responses.

Family, friends and strangers can – and often will – intervene to provide help and support.

So don’t be afraid or embarrassed to discuss issues, state needs, or ask for help.

START NOW – ASK ME A QUESTION!