

## Responding to Survivors with Autism Spectrum Disorders: An Overview for Sexual Assault Advocates

### Image Transcript

[I.D.: A series of speech bubbles is stacked on top of each other. Speech text is transcribed below. End I.D.]

**Person 1:** Hi. My daughter was sexually assaulted at school last fall. I Just learned about this ... and I should tell you she has autism ... high functioning... what do I do?

**Person 2:** I am working with a client who has experienced sexual assault. He has autism. Can you help me understand their experience of that?

**Person 3:** I have had clients, specifically those with autism, who struggle with social cues and long for acceptance, often times unknowingly put themselves in harm's way. I have a few clients who engage in risky behaviors without regard to consequence because that is how they think to make friends. Explaining consent, acknowledging risks and understanding sex and relationships has been difficult to teach to young adults with intellectual delays.

The situations above reflect real-life dilemmas when sexual violence impacts people with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). Multiple studies have shown that sexual victimization of people with disabilities<sup>1</sup> generally is among the highest of any group of people. The Bureau of Justice Statistics found the rate of violent victimization for persons with disabilities was nearly three times the rate of those without during a three-year period (U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics [BJS], 2014). A more recent BJS report found during the 2010-14 timeframe that persons with cognitive disabilities had the highest rates of total violent crime, serious violent crime, and simple assault among the disability types measured (BJS, 2016).

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<sup>1</sup> We are using person-first language in this document, recognizing that there are some in the disability community who do not support person-first language and others who do.