

Autism and the Police: A Book for Black and Brown Kids¹



¹We acknowledge that this story focuses on Black youth and may not be inclusive of the experiences of other People of Color. The terms Black and Brown were chosen intentionally and in direct response to feedback from parents in the Black community who also use the term Brown to represent their race or ethnicity.

Study Title: "Evaluating the Acceptability & Feasibility of a Social Story™ for Black & Brown Children with Autism in Police Interactions" Principal Investigator: Lindsey DeVries, PhD COMIRB No: Version date: 01.28.2021

When you have autism,
interacting with the police can be hard.



Often, its unexpected.
That's really difficult.

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The lights can be **bright and flashy**.

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The sirens can hurt your ears
and make your heart beat really fast!

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If you are a Black or Brown kid, **you** probably have extra worries, like whether bad things will happen to you, like what you hear from adults and on the news.

It is really scary.

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Even your grown-ups may be upset and unsure right now.

That makes sense.

It is ok for your grown-ups to have feelings, too.

There is a lot going on. There is a lot of work to do.

While we work to make things better,

we also want to keep kids

safe in interactions with the police.

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Police are in charge of figuring out if you are being safe.

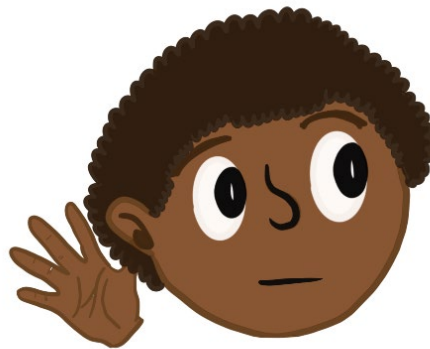
It is really important that you

listen and follow their directions.

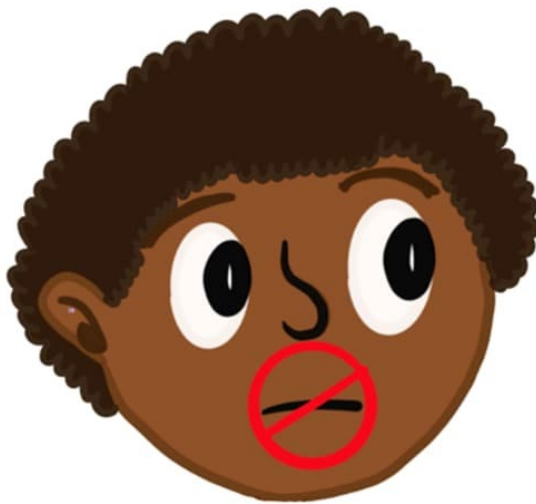


If the police stop you and want to talk to you,
stop what you are doing.

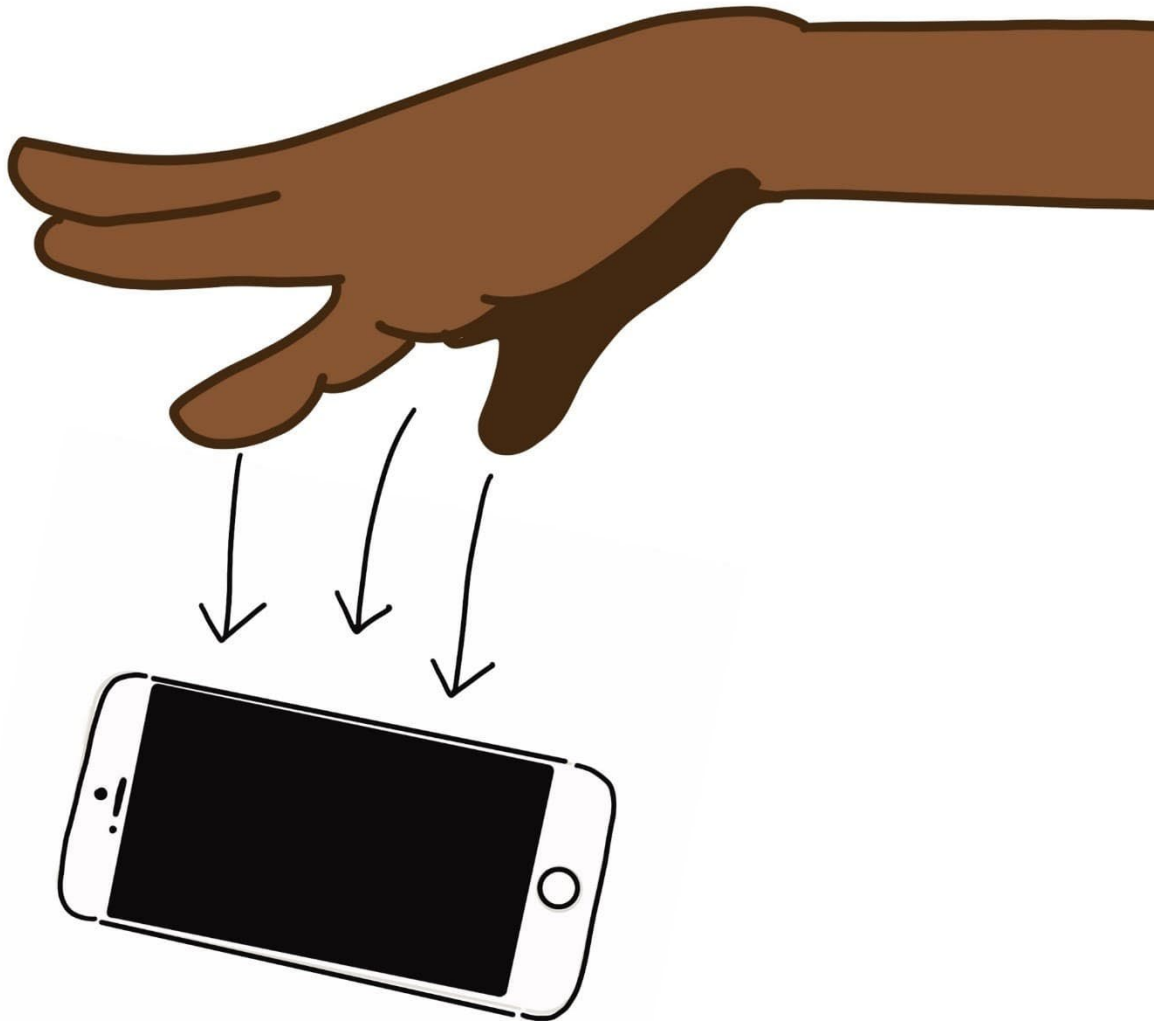
Listen.



Stay quiet.

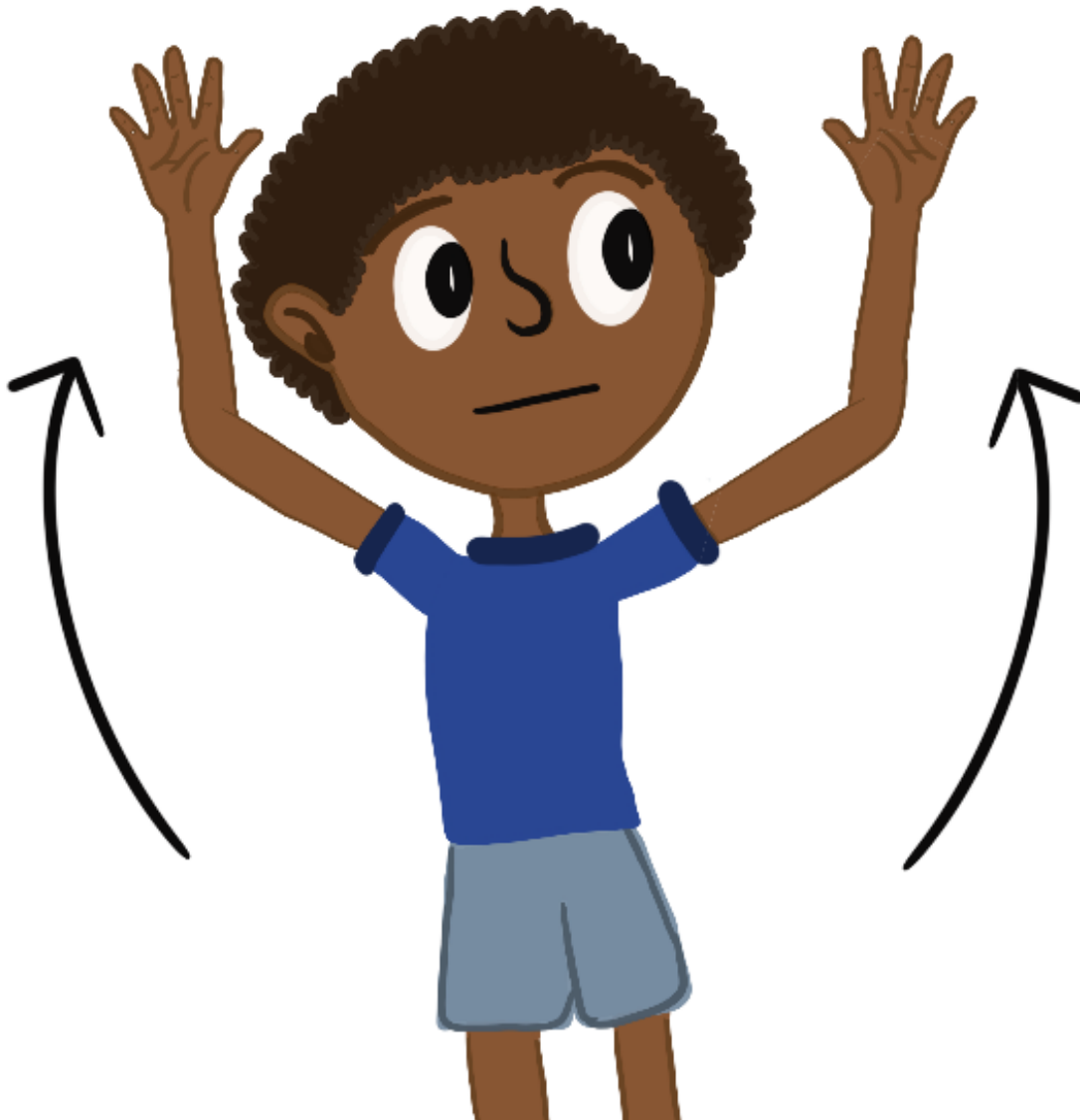


First, gently drop anything you are holding. ¹



¹ Grownups may want to talk about how objects can be replaced, but kids' lives can't. They may need your permission to drop something they've been asked to be careful with, like a phone. You may even want to practice, on a soft surface.

Then, slowly put your hands up and leave them up.



Show the officer your empty hands.

Keep your hands up.

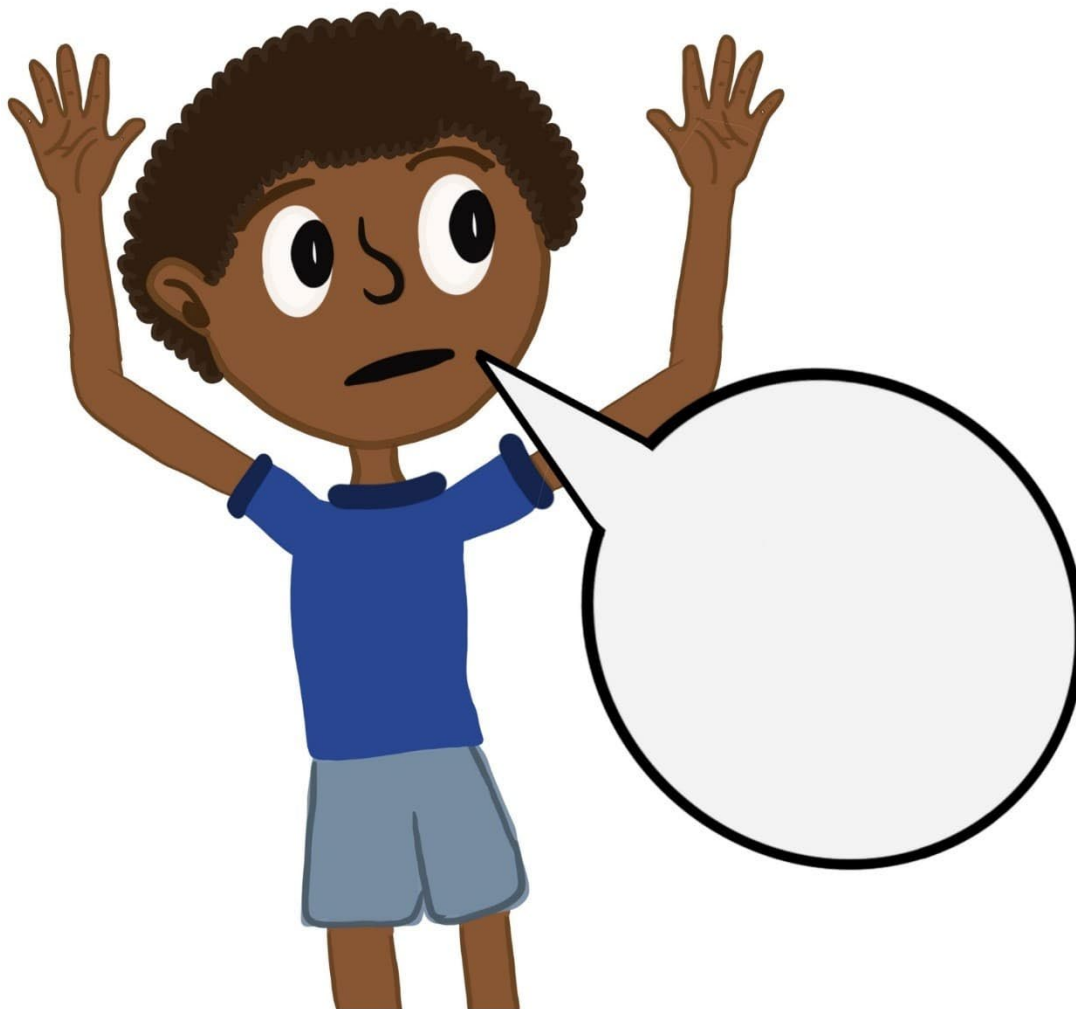
Do not touch your pockets.



Next, say "My name is _____. I am _____ years old. I have autism. I am calm and safe."



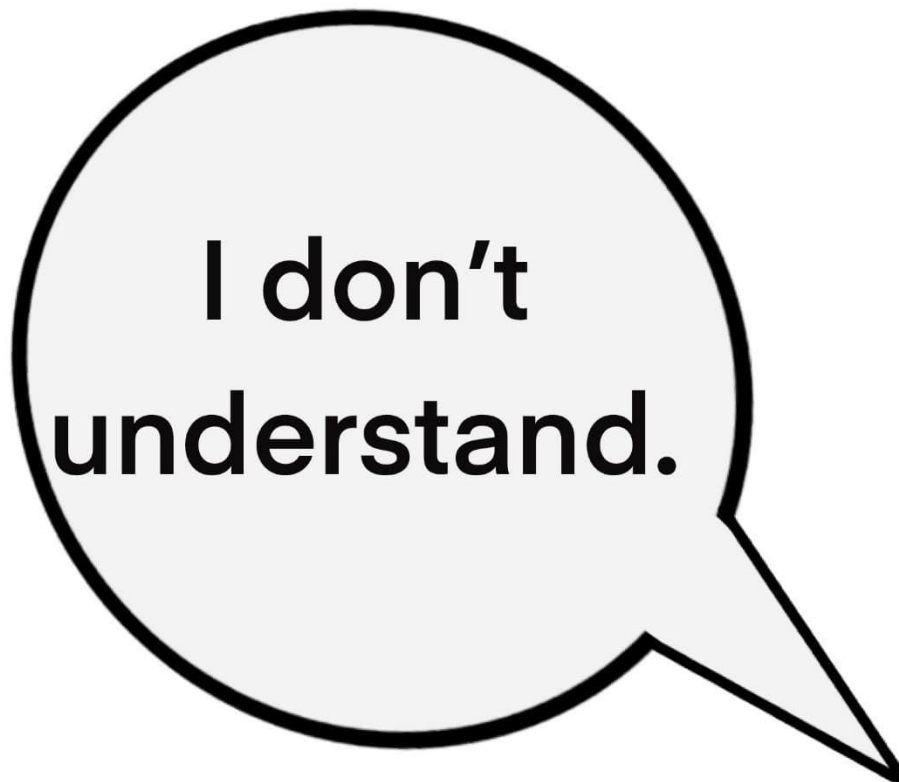
If the police officer asks a question,
stay calm and answer it. ²



² For some families, it's important to remind their kids to ask for their grown-up or a lawyer and NOT answer questions. However, we know people with ASD can take things literally at times, and we wanted to make clear that it's ok to answer simple questions such as "What's your name?" and "Where are you going" We suggest that you talk it out at home, and practice which kinds of questions it's ok to answer, and which are complicated ones and it would be better to wait.

If the police officer tells you to do something,
stay calm and do it.

If you do not understand what to do,
say "I do not understand."



If the police tell you to get on the ground,

get on the ground right away.

That means on your belly,

with your arms and legs away from your body.



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If the officer says

"put your hands behind your back"

do that.



If you wear a lanyard
or carry a card with information about you,
you can ask the officer if they want to see it.



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This might also be a good time
to ask if you or the officer
could **call an adult you trust.**



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Sometimes a police officer
needs to check if you have anything
that could hurt either of you.

They might pat your body up and down.

Take deep breaths and remember to stay calm.



You may feel nervous,
like you want to get away.

It is important to stay right there
and follow the officer's directions.



It is important to keep your hands to yourself.
Remember, the officer is deciding if you are being safe.

Being safe means keeping your hands empty
and where the officer can see them.

If you do not know what to do with your hands,
ask the officer **"where should I put my hands?"**



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When the officer is done talking to you,
they might say "you can go now."

Or they might decide they need to know more,
and call some other people.



It can be scary when you do not know what will happen.

Take a deep breath and let it out slowly.



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You can ask about calling someone

who can help you, like an adult you trust.

You can ask **what is going to happen next.**



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Usually, if the police stop you,
you will get to leave after they are done talking to you.

Sometimes, they might decide
to take you someplace else to find out more.
This might be a hospital or a youth center.



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Remember to **take deep breaths**,
follow directions,
and **ask to have an adult** you trust
with you as soon as possible.



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Remember, police do not know you yet!

It is important to show them
that you are calm and safe,
so you can go home.



Stay safe out there!

You are important and you are valued!

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The information contained herein was developed by The University of Colorado, Department of Pediatrics, JFK Partners and Children's Hospital Colorado as a resource for families and children with ASD. This booklet does not constitute legal advice. You may wish to contact an attorney for any specific questions regarding your rights related to law enforcement encounters.