

Tips on Making 911 Calls for People with Disabilities

Background

People with disabilities are more likely than typically developing peers to have interactions with the justice system and be incarcerated. That can start right from a 911 call the person makes, or a call that is made regarding someone with a disability. Planning ahead to create positive interactions can create life changing differences.

Preparing

There are lots of ways to prepare for a 911 call, which can increase your safety if you do need to call. Think about both being the caller, and the person the call is about. *If in doubt, call.* They want to help. Usually, if you call 911 but do not speak, an officer will be sent out if they can find your location from your landline (preferred) or by triangulating your cell phone. *Leave the call open as long as possible to help them do that.*

You may also want to make yourself a handwritten or typed card with your name, contact information, address, diagnoses, and information about your needs and communication style to hand to first responders. You can use our template at <https://thearcofnova.org/programs-services/library/#c-j-s>

Prepare Ahead	Tell/Show/Give 911 and First Responders
Enter a profile with your local Marcus Alert system so they know you and your needs. (All Virginia 911 systems will have this by 2022)	Your name and location (address, intersection, landmarks, directions to their room in the home). Have a number at which they can call you back if you get disconnected. <i>Call from a landline if possible.</i>
Save emergency and non-emergency contacts in your phones or written down.	Urgency and who you need. Is it an emergency? Should police, fire, and/or rescue come?
Write down your information , like name, address, diagnosis, and somethings first responders should know (e.g., if you like sirens or lights, if you have medications that need to stay refrigerated) and practice saying them. Keep copies on the fridge and in the glovebox of all cars.	Diagnosis and needs of the person with a disability. Do they speak or communicate another way? Do they have a medical or medication history that responders must know? Do they have a weapon? Refer back to the Marcus Alert profile. If you have this written down, give responders a copy when they arrive.
Contact your local non-emergency line and ask to go through a practice call or practice text to 911.	Stay on the line. They can help find you and gather more information this way.

Resources

To learn more about how to prepare for any interactions with the justice system and to see more on traffic stops, please check out these resources.

- <https://thearcofnova.org/> to ask a question of our team, including how to get more information on this issue.
- bit.ly/DisabilityJusticeVideos for a series of mini-videos on traffic stops, helping people with disabilities navigate 911 calls and police interactions, and other community resources.
- bit.ly/DisabilityJusticeGuide for a written guide for people with disabilities and their families on finding advocates, supportive resources, and accommodation options available to them to prevent negative interactions with the justice system and find assistance if they are arrested.
- Look into your local Marcus Alert system and set up an emergency profile (all parts of VA will have this by 2022).