

# Resources for Supporting Children on the Autism Spectrum

Presentation for

**APCO**

**April 2022**



NATIONAL CENTER FOR  
**MISSING &  
EXPLOITED**  
CHILDREN®

# Agenda Topics

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- NCMEC History & Mission
- Understanding Children on the Autism Spectrum
- Resources
- Questions



# WHO WE ARE

- Founded in 1984
- Nonprofit, non-governmental organization
- Congressionally funded in part to operate 15 programs related to missing and exploited children
- National resource center for families, law enforcement and other professionals



# OUR MISSION

**Find Missing Children**

**Reduce Child Sexual Exploitation**

**Prevent Future Victimization**

Hope is why we're here.



# Definition & CDC Data

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- Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a **developmental disability** that can cause significant social, communication, and behavioral challenges
- The learning, thinking, and problem-solving abilities of children with ASD **varies**
- Some children with ASD need a **lot of help** in their daily lives; others **need less**

In 2018, **1 in 44** children aged 8 were estimated by CDC to have ASD

In 2021, **286** children on the autism spectrum were reported missing to NCMEC

Sources: <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/facts.html>  
and <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/ss/ss7011a1.htm> and  
<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/autism-spectrum-disorders-asd/>



# Understanding Children on the Autism Spectrum

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A child on the autism spectrum may:

- **Wander** away or **bolt**
- Have a diminished sense of fear or engage in high-risk behavior, such as seeking **water** or active roadways
- Seek small or **tightly enclosed spaces** concealing themselves from search teams
- Be unable to respond to law enforcement because of their **communication style**
- Be at a higher **risk for exploitation** because of their disability



# Communication & Sensory Processing

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Verbal, non-verbal, minimally verbal

May use alternative modes of communication

May only cite scripts or use echolalia

May only understand direct language

May require additional processing time

Sensory overload (causes bolting)



# Behavioral Effects

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May have obsessive tendencies or interests, or rigidity

May act impulsively

May show repetitive behaviors that provide sensory stimulation - “Stimming”

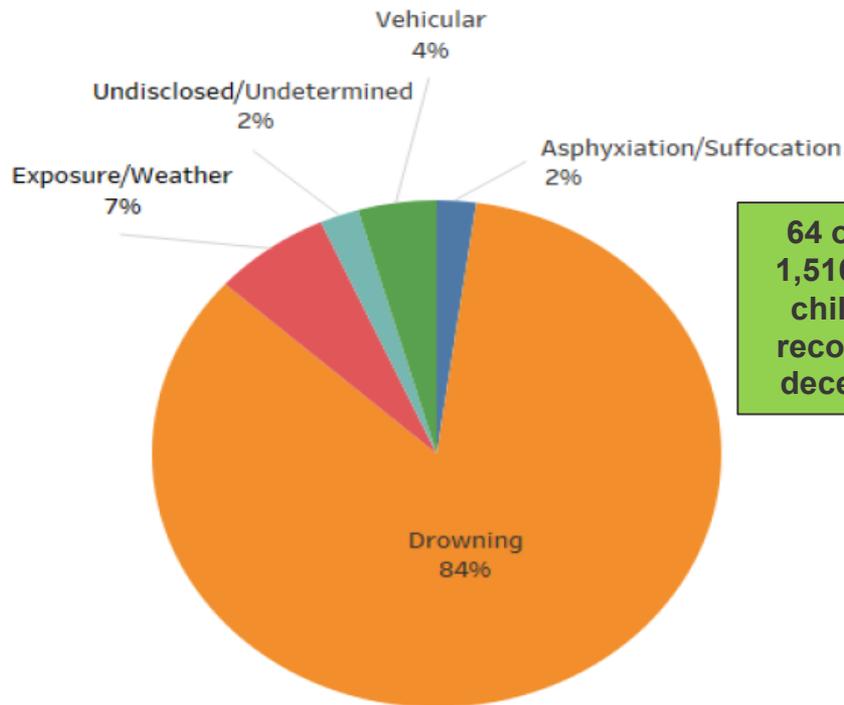
Anxiety can increase stimming

Challenging behavior could be caused by inability to communicate, pain, anxiety



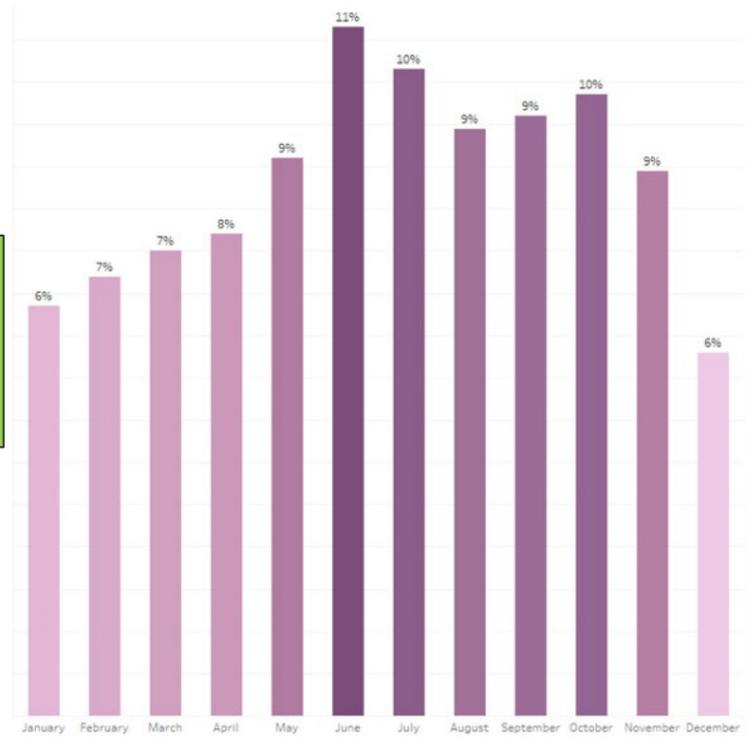
# NCMEC Data (2011-2020)

### Causes of Accidental Deaths



64 out of 1,516 (4%) children recovered deceased

### Missing Month Across All Years



# NCMEC Data (2011-2020)

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## Most Common Characteristics of Missing Children on the Autism Spectrum

<b>Sex:</b> Male (75%)	<b>Age:</b> 16 (19%) or 17 (19%)	<b>Race:</b> White (60%)	<b>Case Type:</b> ERU (67%)	<b>Case Status:</b> Recovered (98%) 
<b>Missing Month:</b> June (11%)	<b>Missing Location:</b> Home (45%)	<b>Recovery Location:</b> Home (26%) or Outdoor Area (26%)	<b>Recovery Method:</b> Police Investigation (46%) 	<b>Recovered in the Same State from Where They Went Missing:</b> (87%)



# Recommended Resources



# Core Components of Outreach & Awareness

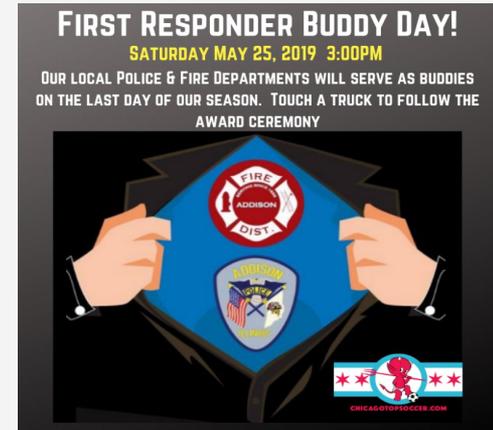
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Officer Training

Community Education & Outreach

Community Partnerships & Events

Communication



# Recommended First Responder Programs & Community Partnerships

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**SAFE**  
RETURN

San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department



[wp.sbcounty.gov/sheriff/safe-return-program/](http://wp.sbcounty.gov/sheriff/safe-return-program/)

Many local law enforcement organizations provide opportunities for caregivers to **alert officers** of a child's wandering behaviors



**PREMISE ALERT PROGRAM**



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF LAW ENFORCEMENT

SERVICE ♦ INTEGRITY ♦ RESPECT ♦ QUALITY



# Recommended Resources for Caregivers

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Red Cross swim lessons are offered at 3,500 aquatic facilities throughout the U.S.



**“Water safety isn’t just fun – it’s essential.”**  
Lindsay Mondick, director of innovative priorities at Y-USA.



# NCMEC Resources

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Investigative  
checklists &  
search protocols

Tips for  
Caregivers

Key Information

Team Adam

Team HOPE



Understanding Children on the  
Autism Spectrum: A Guide for First  
Responders



Search Protocols and  
Questionnaire for First  
Responders



Supporting Children on the Autism  
Spectrum: Tips for Caregivers



# Tips for Caregivers

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**Identify the risks** for your child and let those who are close to them know where your child may go.

**Make a plan** with your child's school in the event they leave the classroom. Wandering can be addressed in your child's Individualized Education Program.

**Be familiar** with local bodies of water, proximity to highways, and other landmarks near your child's residence and school. Encourage your child's school to keep relevant maps in the main office so they are readily accessible in case of emergency.

**Help others understand** that children on the autism spectrum may not speak, be non-responsive to their name being called, or fearful of any close contact with people they do not know.



# NCMEC Resources

- Model Programs & Resources for LE & Families:  
<https://www.missingkids.org/theissues/autism>
- 2011-2020 Report on Missing Children on the Autism Spectrum
- 4 NCMEC CONNECT Modules:  
<https://connect.missingkids.org/>
- 4 Blogs on Swimming Safety, Searching Water, etc.
- Partnership with National Autism Association
- IACP Locative Technology Grant
- ADAM Program



How to Search for  
and Protect Children  
on the Autism Spectrum

Thursday, July 29th  
10:00 am to 11:00 am ET



# Key Takeaways

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Children on the autism spectrum go missing & are recovered deceased at a rate higher than other children

Immediately search water & encourage swim lessons

Sign up for the ADAM Program

Simple measures can save lives



# Training & Professional Development

## Welcome to NCMEC CONNECT

Your virtual gateway to trainings, resources and best practices related to missing and exploited children. Build your knowledge set around these issues to better protect children in your community

[connect.missingkids.org](https://connect.missingkids.org)



*FREE on-demand trainings, resources and best practices related to missing and exploited children.*



Protect

Reduce

Prevent

## Executive Leadership Series on Missing & Exploited Children



[MissingKids.org/Training](https://MissingKids.org/Training)

Course designed for executives and managers in law enforcement agencies, emergency communications centers, and state clearinghouse managers to:

- Familiarize leaders in public safety with current issues related to missing and sexually exploited children
- Learn about effective policies and practices, emerging trends, and resources for responding to and investigating these unique cases





# Missing Kids Readiness Program (MKRP)



[MissingKids.org/MKRP](https://MissingKids.org/MKRP)

Free program that promotes policies and best practices for responding to calls of missing and sexually exploited children. Once training and policy elements are met, member agencies are publicly recognized by NCMEC.

## Eligible agencies

- Law enforcement agencies
- Emergency communications centers

## Requirements

- Agency leader completes CEOMEC, PRPL or MKRP course
- All sworn personnel or telecommunicators complete required online modules
- Adoption of Model Policy or alignment with industry standards

Training for  
Professionals | MKRP



# Check out Our Website & Social Media



The Issues

**Autism &  
Wandering**

A collage of six images is arranged in a grid. The top row features a penguin on a crosswalk, a child playing with colorful blocks, and a man in a uniform interacting with a child. The bottom row shows a child in a black dress spinning on grass, a child holding a lit sparkler, and a logo for MissingKids.org/autism with the text 'MISSING &amp; EXPLOITED'.

Updated data and resources for  
**Autism Awareness Month**



[MissingKids.org/autism](https://MissingKids.org/autism)

**#AutismAwarenessMonth**



## NCMEC Contacts

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**Missing Children Division**

**[jepaluska@ncmec.org](mailto:jepaluska@ncmec.org)**

**1-800-THE-LOST**



**For more resources, please visit  
[MissingKids.org/autism](https://MissingKids.org/autism)**



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# Missing Endangered Persons Information Clearinghouse

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF LAW ENFORCEMENT



# FDLE Missing Endangered Persons Information Clearinghouse

Florida Department of Law Enforcement

Inspector Chad Hoffman

1-888-FL-MISSING



\*

# Autism Awareness for Law Enforcement and Communications



Inspector Chad Hoffman



# FDLE: TYPES OF ALERTS THAT DEAL WITH KIDS (3)

## AMBER

### America's Missing Broadcast Emergency Response



Named after Amber Hagerman, a 9-year-old child who was abducted and murdered in Arlington, Texas in 1996

In 2000, FDLE, along with our state, local, and private partners, developed a plan to establish the AMBER Alert.

# MCA Criteria

Missing Child Alert  
Established to 2003

- The child must be under 18 years of age
- The local law enforcement agency has a well founded belief based on an active investigation, that the **child is in danger of death or serious bodily injury**
- There is a detailed description or photograph of the child
- The local law enforcement agency recommends activation

# ENHANCED MCA CRITERIA

Enhanced Missing Child Alert  
Established to 2019

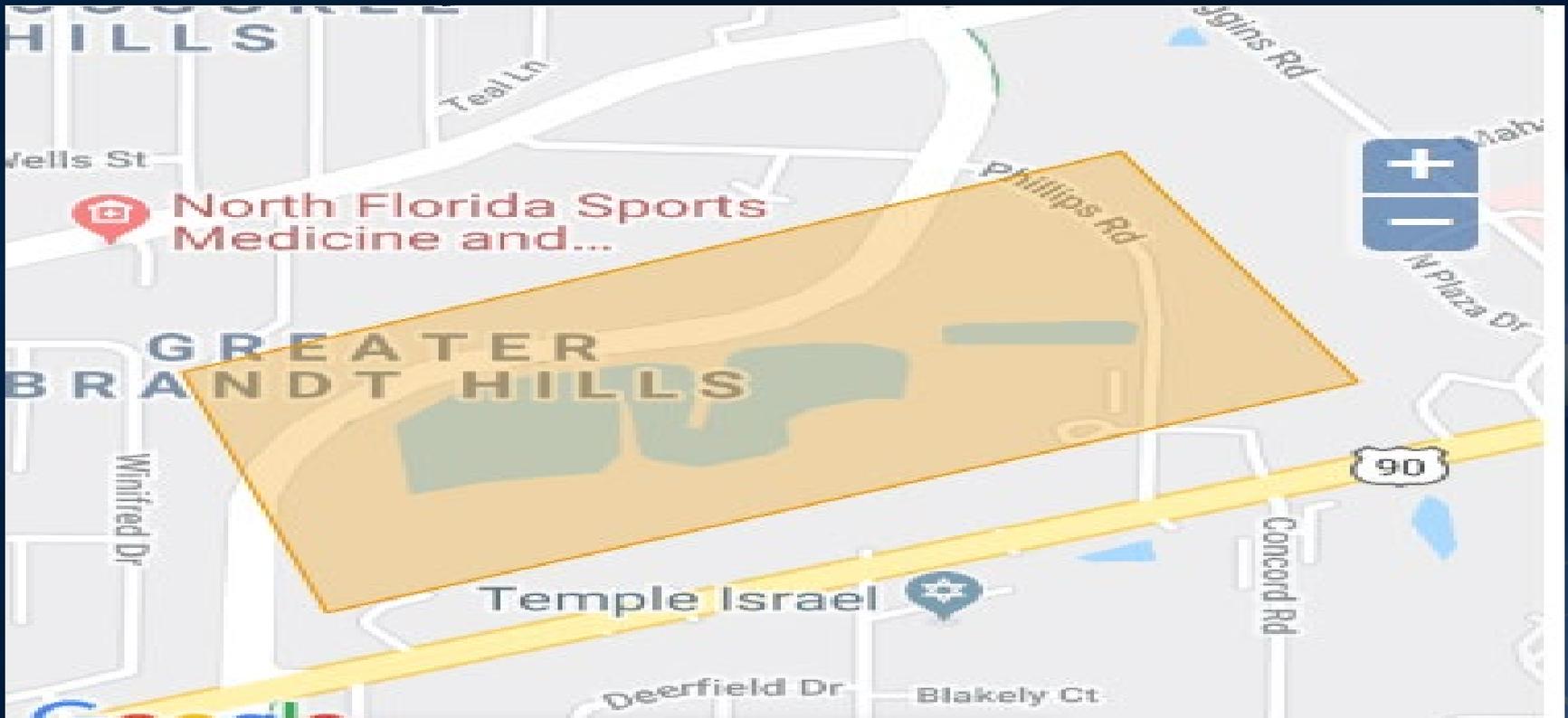
- The child must be under 18 years of age
- The local law enforcement agency has a well founded belief based on an active investigation, that the child is in **imminent** danger of death or serious bodily injury
- There is a detailed description or photograph of the child
- The local law enforcement agency recommends activation

# ENHANCED MISSING CHILD ALERT

- Primarily utilized for missing children who have been diagnosed as being on the autism spectrum.
- Intended for cases where law enforcement believe the child is still in close proximity (up to five miles)

# ENHANCED MCA

"WIRELESS EMERGENCY ALERT"



THE MOST IMPORTANT TOOL/RESOURCE FOR  
FINDING MISSING KIDS WITH AUTISM.

# METHODOLOGY FOR ENHANCED MCA (Before 2022)

- 911 receives call
- 911 notifies police agency to respond to the scene
- Initial investigation, supervisor involvement, resources added, Missing Persons Investigator called out, command post, etc.
- Law Enforcement Agency notifies the FDLE and requests MCA
- **INVESTIGATION MAY OR MAY NOT DISCOVER THAT THE CHILD HAS AUTISM**
- **TIME DELAYS SIMPLY UNACCEPTABLE**

**“TIME IS TRULY EVERYTING .”**



**Autism Spectrum Awareness Telecommunicator Training**

**“ IDENTIFY  
&  
NOTIFY ”**



# Methodology for Enhanced MCA (AFTER 2022)

## Accelerated Protocol

- 911 receives the call for a missing child
- Utilizing the 911 Autism Telecommunicator Training, 911 Operator asks specific questions in reference to the child having Autism
- If 911 Operator discovers child has Autism, the following entities are notified immediately:
  - 911 Supervisor
  - Law Enforcement Agency responding to the scene
- Law Enforcement Agency notifies the FDLE's MEPIC Unit to begin the process of an **ENHANCED MCA**

# “IDENTIFY”

## SG08 – MISSING PERSON

# “NOTIFY”

1. Where are they missing from?
2. How old is the missing person?
3. How long have they been missing?
4. What is their description?  
(Name, DOB, Race, Sex, Height/Weight, Hair/Eyes & Clothing)
5. Does the person have an Autism Spectrum Disorder, a developmental disability, or a learning disability associated with Autism that law enforcement needs to be aware of?

### IF YES: Ages 17 and under notify Communications Supervisor

- a. Are they verbal or nonverbal?  
If Nonverbal: What is their mode of communication?
  - b. Do they have a sensory issue to touch or sound?
6. Are there any bodies of water nearby?
  7. Are they missing, or did they run away? (habitual)

### VERIFIED RETURNED / LOCATED MISSING PERSONS:

If FCIC/NCIC entry was made, a unit MUST respond to confirm the return of the adult or juvenile. Add the original case number to the comments field.

1. Verify the adult/juvenile is in FCIC/NCIC
2. What is the case number?
3. Are they causing a disturbance? Known to be violent?

### AUTISTIC CHILD:

The communications supervisor on duty will contact FDLE 888-356-4774 and inform them to standby for a possible request for Enhanced Missing Child Alert.

### USEFUL INFORMATION

**Priority 1:** Endangered Criteria: Ages 12 and under, elderly; serious medical conditions; special needs such as Alzheimer's, Dementia, Autism.

**Priority 2:** Runaway or ages 13-17



An aerial photograph showing a large, dense wooded area on the left and center. To the right, a paved road curves through a residential neighborhood with several houses and parked cars. The scene is captured from a high angle, showing the texture of the trees and the layout of the road.

**12:30 PM-**  
**TOMMY LEAVES SCHOOL PREMISES**

**12:40 PM-**  
**SCHOOL NOTIFIES 911 DISPATCH**

**12:45 PM-**  
**FIRST OFFICER ARRIVES ON SCENE**

Google Earth

**POLICE RECOVERY & RESPONSE: (12:50) LAW ENFORCEMENT AND TEACHERS STILL SEARCHING IMMEDIATE AREA NEAR SCHOOL.**



**POLICE RECOVERY & RESPONSE: (1:30 PM) LAW ENFORCEMENT  
CANVASSING NEARBY AREA AROUND SCHOOL.**



**POLICE RECOVERY & RESPONSE: (2:30 PM) LAW ENFORCEMENT PERSONNEL CONTINUE TO FLOOD AREA , K-9 DEPLOYED, AS WELL AS HELICOPTER.**



# UTILYZING NEW TELECOMMUNICATOR TRAINING AND STANDARDS

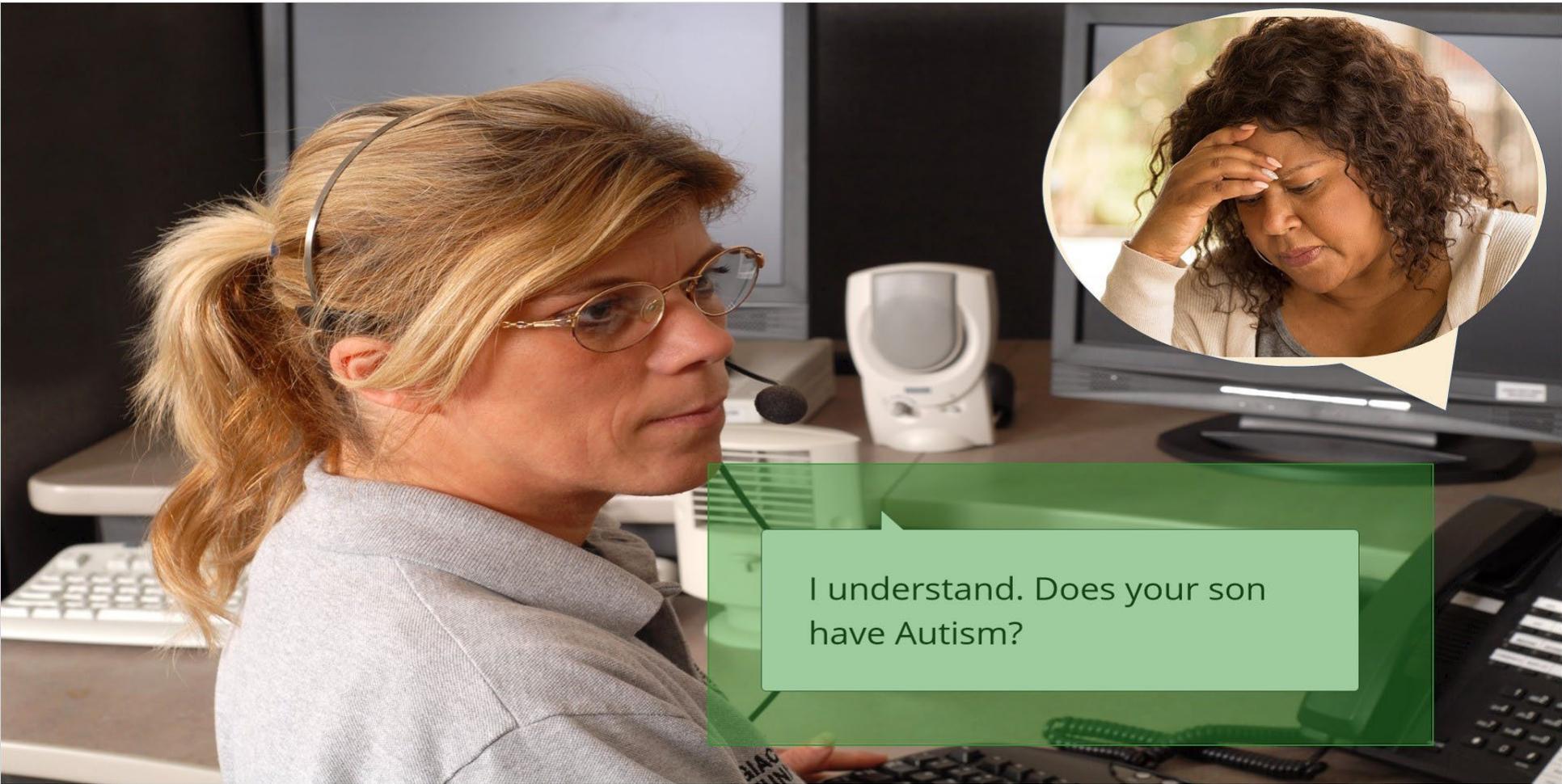
911 DISPATCH BECOMES THE MOST CRITICAL  
COMPONENT TO FINDING A CHILD WITH AUTISM



**“MINUTES MATTER”**

# IDENTIFYING CHILD HAS AUTISM IS CRITICAL

“From HOURS to MINUTES.”



I understand. Does your son have Autism?

12:40 PM CALL IS RECEIVED

12:41 PM CHILD IDENTIFIED AS HAVING AUTISM

An aerial photograph showing a large, dense wooded area in the center. To the right, a paved road curves through a residential neighborhood with several houses and parked cars. The text is overlaid on the wooded area.

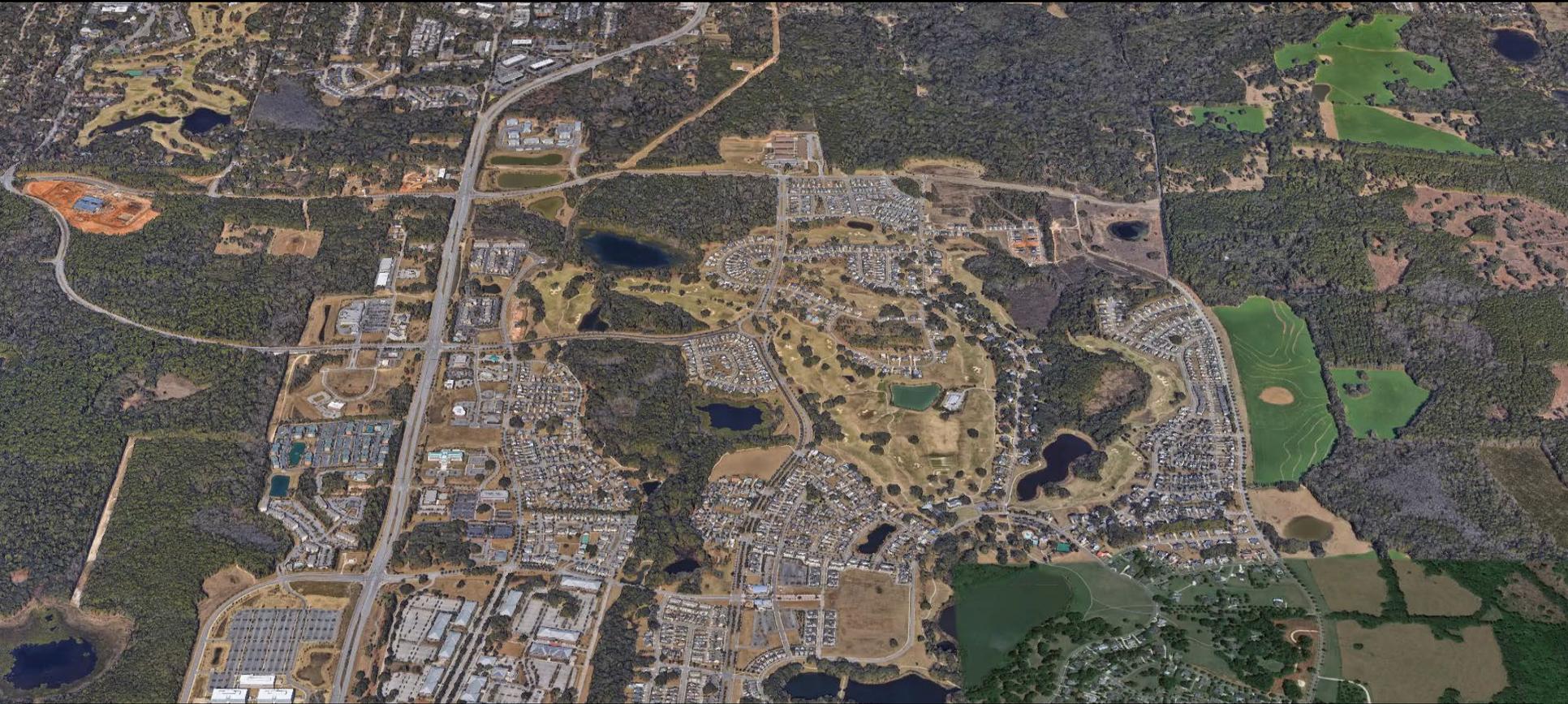
**12:30 PM-**  
**TOMMY LEAVES SCHOOL**  
**PREMISES**

**12:40 PM-**  
**SCHOOL NOTIFIES 911 DISPATCH**

**12:45 PM-**  
**FIRST OFFICER ARRIVES ON**  
**SCENE**

Google Earth

# Enhanced MCA INITIATED AT 1:00 PM



**“GEO-FENCING” AN ENTIRE NEIGHBORHOOD**

Google Earth



# FINAL OUTCOME





# Questions, PHASE TWO ??



**INSPECTOR CHAD HOFFMAN**

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**850.363.4717 (24/7)**

**850.251.4017**

<http://www.fdle.state.fl.us/Media/BPDTraining/AutismTelecommunicator/story.html>