NEURODEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES
FIRST RESPONDER QUICK GUIDE

Communication differences can look like noncompliance. Slow down, reduce stimulation, and make the interaction predictable.

1	2	3	4
SLOW DOWN	**SAY LESS**	**REDUCE**	**EXPLAIN**
Allow time to process.	One clear instruction.	Noise, lights, people, touch.	Tell what happens next.

WHAT YOU MAY SEE

Eye contact differences
Looking away may help the person listen or regulate.

Delayed response
Extra processing time is not the same as refusal.

Different communication
Speech may be scripted, limited, hard to understand, or supported by AAC.

Repetitive movement or speech
Rocking, pacing, hand movements, or repeated phrases may be self-regulation.

Sensory overload
Sirens, lights, crowds, touch, or multiple voices can increase distress.

Restlessness / impulsivity
Attention or executive-function differences may affect stillness and multi-step directions.

DO THIS

- ✓ Speak directly to the person.
- ✓ Use short, concrete sentences.
- ✓ Give one instruction at a time.
- ✓ Pause and allow extra response time.
- ✓ Use one primary communicator when possible.
- Reduce unnecessary lights, sirens, radios, crowds, and touch.
- Explain before approaching, touching, searching, or moving the person.
- ✓ Allow safe self-regulatory movement and access to communication tools.

PLAIN LANGUAGE: SAY THIS INSTEAD

Instead of: "Calm down." →	**Try:** "You are safe. I'm going to give you some space."
Instead of: "Do you understand?" →	**Try:** "Tell me what I am asking you to do."
Instead of: "Stop doing that and look at me." →	**Try:** "You don't have to look at me. Please listen to my voice."
Instead of: "Follow my instructions." →	**Try:** "First, keep your hands where I can see them. I'll tell you the next step."

ASK, DON'T ASSUME

"What can I do to make it easier for you to understand me and communicate with me?"

WHEN DISTRESS IS INCREASING

REDUCE
Noise • lights • people • demands • proximity

REASSURE
Use a calm voice and predictable language.

REGULATE
Allow space, safe movement, AAC, or comfort items.

COMMUNICATE
One short question or instruction at a time.

BEHAVIOR IS INFORMATION.

Before interpreting behavior as intentional resistance, consider whether the person may be having difficulty communicating, processing, regulating, or coping with the environment.

DESTINATION *Illumination*

Illuminating Minds. Preventing Crisis.
Empowering Neurodivergent Communities.