

IN A DIFFERENT KEY:
THE AUTISM UNDERSTANDING TOOLKIT

POLICE (mis)UNDERSTANDING



INTRODUCTORY CONTEXT

(suggested)

There was a time when autistic people were not as visible in society as they are today. One reason for that was the practice of institutionalizing them, which was common as recently as the 1970s. That is no longer the case, and in theory, at least, autistic individuals are encouraged to spend as much time out among the public as anyone else. But there is still misunderstanding among many about how autistic people behave, speak and respond – and that misunderstanding can lead to dangerous situations. This scene from IN A DIFFERENT KEY shows one such situation that comes up too often, when autistic people encounter police, and the police misinterpret their behaviors. **(Note: this video contains a brief sequence of an autistic man being treated violently)**

KEY THEMES

- Consequences of police misunderstanding autistic people
- Solutions for police misunderstanding
- Solutions for autistic people misunderstanding the police

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

What went wrong in this interaction?

What might have happened differently if the officers understood autism better?

What other situations could prove dangerous for autistic people due to misunderstanding?

What about teaching autistic people how to respond to the police? Is that part of the solution?

Are there other professional groups that would benefit from training around autism?