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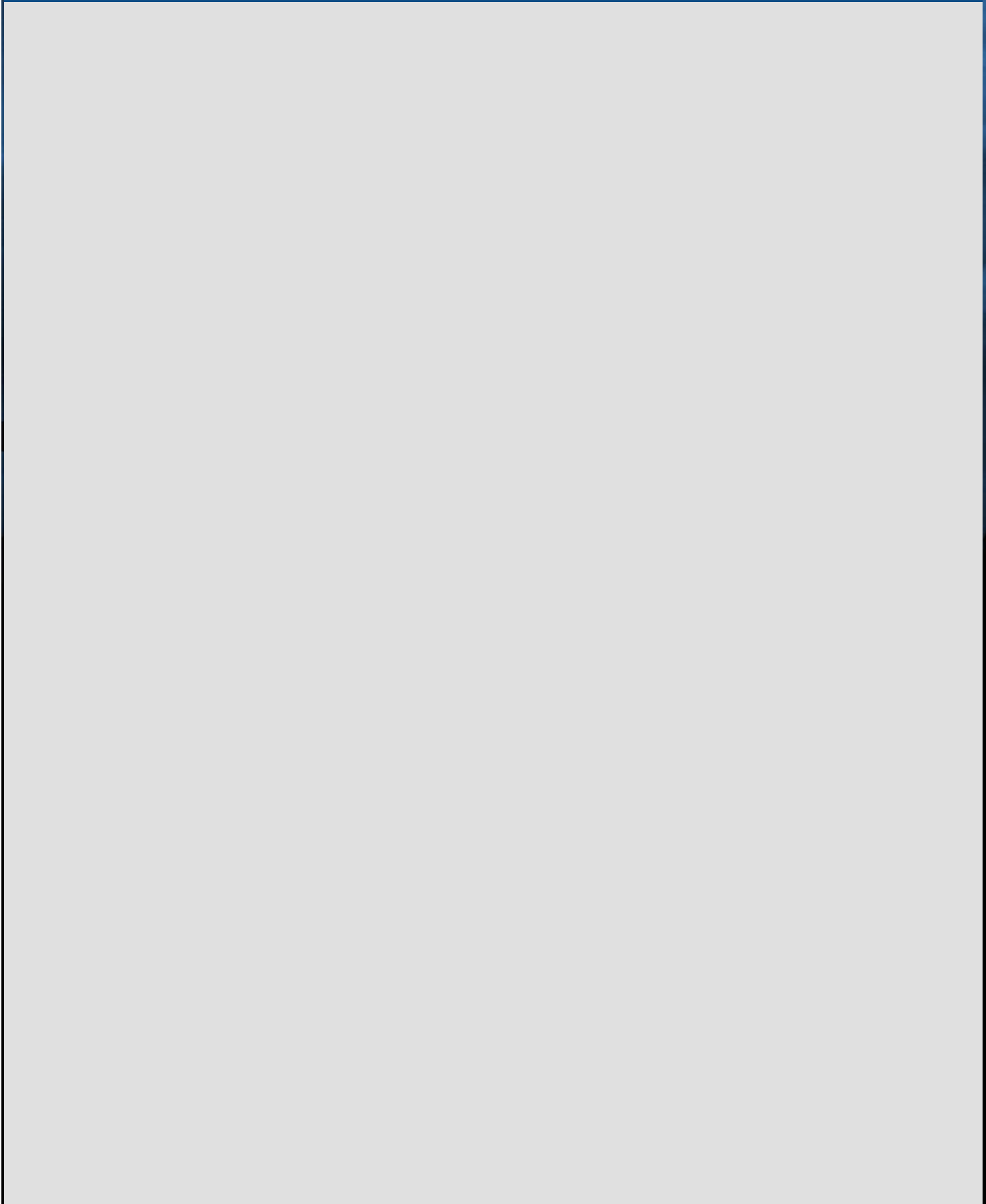
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# Maxwell first responders receive special needs response training

By Phil Berube, Maxwell Public Affairs / Published October 30, 2017



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42nd Air Base Wing Shield



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## MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, Ala. --

Maxwell emergency first responders received training recently on how to identify and communicate with people with autism spectrum disorder or other developmental disabilities when showing up on the scene of an incident.

Diagnosis of children with ASD is on the increase in the United States, from an estimated 1 in 150 births in 2000 to at an estimated 1 in 68 births in 2010, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, so the odds of a first responder coming in contact with someone with the disorder are also increasing.

Recognition and Evaluation of Autism Contact Training was conducted Oct. 23 for Maxwell security forces, fire department personnel and medical staff.

REACT is a partnership with the University of Alabama-Birmingham School of Health Professions and the Interaction Advisory Group, which was created to provide customized special needs awareness and training for first responders, public service officials, educators and private sector workers. The training is a Community Partnership Program initiative between Maxwell and the Alabama Council on Developmental Disabilities.

Security forces members are usually the first to arrive on the scene of an emergency or non-emergency situation, and they have to quickly assess the situation and interview those involved.

"Security forces are trained to respond to a crisis situation with a certain protocol, but this protocol may not always be the best way to interact with individuals with autism," said Damon Salter, the chief of training for 42<sup>nd</sup> Security Forces Squadron. "Because they are usually the first to respond on scene, it is critical they have a working knowledge of autism and the wide variety of exhibited behaviors."

The four-hour training course covered sensory issues associated with ASD and developmental disabilities, identification of certain characteristics of a person with autism, best-communication practices, de-escalation techniques and "wandering."

"This specialized training is crucial to first responders in order to keep themselves and the person with autism or developmental disabilities safe. Our number one priority is safety," said Dustin Chandler, course instructor and president and co-founder of Interaction Advisory Group. "We also want to make sure individuals with autism and developmental disabilities are treated fairly during the interactions they may have with officers or other first responders."

Chandler is uniquely qualified to deliver the training.

"I'm a former police officer who knows what it's like working patrol," he said. "I understand exactly what officers go through on a daily basis. I'm also the father of a special needs child who knows exactly what it's like for families like mine."

Military police officers receive little to no formal training on how to identify or communicate with people with ASD or developmental disabilities, said Salter.

The REACT course filled a training void and will help emergency responders be better prepared to interact with someone with ASD.

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