

IN A DIFFERENT KEY

# 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 for them. This scene from IN A DIFFERENT KEY shows one such situation that comes up too often, when autistic people encounter police, and either the autistic person does not understand police instructions or intentions, or the police misinterpret the autistic person's behaviors. **(Note: this video contains a brief sequence of an autistic man being treated violently)**

## KEY THEMES

- Consequences of police misunderstanding and misinterpreting autism
- Solutions for police misunderstanding
- Solutions for autistic people to better understand the role of police

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

What went wrong in this interaction?

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

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

What useful insights can others draw here -- family members, neighbors, teachers, or any of us -- about their own interactions with autistic people?

*Look under “Challenging Contexts: Autism and Policing” in the Further Explorations Catalogue for more information about solutions to the challenges raised.*