

Austin Police Department (APD)

1. What type of training are you offering your officers who are dealing with people who have developmental disabilities?

All APD officers are required to take the intermediate crisis intervention training. The course goal is to develop a basic understanding and respect for the fundamental rights of and a proficiency in interacting with people with mental illness. It is imperative that officers understand mental illness and use tactics and techniques that work most effectively when responding to individuals in these situations. These tactics and techniques are different than those routinely taught to officers to control conflict due to the underlying elements behind the behavior, which is usually not of a criminal or malicious intent. The CIT course is designed to educate officers in the basic elements of mental illness and prepare them to utilize practical applications of de-escalation techniques. This information can help keep the officer safe, keep the mental health consumer safe, and greatly reduce liability on the part of the officer and the agency.

The essential difference between suspect encounter training which is traditionally taught to officers and the training on how to approach the mentally ill is the need to be non-confrontational.

During the Police Academy cadets receive the 40 hours Basic Crisis Intervention training. The goal of the training is for cadets to recognize and understand the symptomatic behavior of persons who have a form of mental illness. It also teaches the cadets to formulate appropriate strategies for gaining the individual's compliance. During this training cadets are taken through role play scenario and practical problems.

In addition to the above training, all certified CIT officers received an additional 40 hours of advance training.

2. Do I have to be an officer for 2 years before I can work for the police department in a mental health position? – The internet is deceiving about that.

Even though all cadets receive the basic crisis intervention training and all officers receive the intermediate crisis intervention training, only officers who have a minimum of 2 years of law enforcement experience with APD and who have successfully completed the TCLEOSE prescribed certification course can be a CIT officer.

3. What efforts is APD making to increase their awareness regarding mental health recovery?

The APD CIT unit act as a liaison between CITs officers assigned to patrol and the facilities/providers and consumers within the mental health community. In addition, APD CIT unit works closely with PES and their Mobile Crisis Unit with consist of nurse practitioners, social worker and a doctor.

Sheriff's Department

1. Is county jail staff trained in handling an inmate with mental illness?
2. What evaluation is done when a person enters the county jail to determine if there is the potential for suicide or is mentally ill?
3. What are you doing to change the perception of Williamson County as a redneck tough on crime, which may impact tough sentencing particularly on African-Americans and those who are mentally ill?
4. Does Williamson County have any intentions to bring together the faith-based leaders to address or improve police/community relationships? When? Where?

MHMR Substance abuse

APD and Sheriff's Department

1. Is there a program for someone with a drug problem where a family member can turn them in and that person won't be looked at as a criminal?

There are many grass root social service programs which house and treat substance abusers. A good resource is the 2-1-1 information system which could provide families with referral service information about substance abuse facilities that are currently available. The following are a few resources which are currently available: Austin Resource Center for the Homeless (ARCH), Clean Investment Counseling Center, and Phoenix House for juvenile substance abusers, PES and the Mary Lee School, as well as resources available through MHMR.

2. How can I as one citizen support you, Chief and Sheriff, to continue what you have initiated in our community? Citizens should continue open communication and support of the Police Department by staying involved.

3. When someone clearly has a mental illness affecting their ability to make decisions, how do your officers decide whether to arrest them or not, for things like criminal trespass?

Whether or not a mentally ill person is arrested depends on the severity of the crime that has been committed. A mentally ill person will only be arrested if the individual has committed a felony offense, family violence offense, DWI offense or public intoxication offense. A public intoxicated person will only be arrested if he/she can not be placed safely with family, friends, or a support group.

If a suspected mentally ill person is placed in jail, the arresting officer will advise the booking clerk and the nurse at the Travis County Booking Facilities that the Travis County Mental Health Unit needs to evaluate the prisoner before releasing the prisoner from jail.

4. Are there any mental health initiatives in place which specifically target the student/university population with law enforcement? **Unknown.** The CIT unit has provided some training to UT police officers, Park Police officers, City Marshal officers and Airport Police officers.
5. Are there community outreach personnel on staff? **Victim Services Counselors, District Representatives officers, Crisis Intervention Unit and Officers, and Community Liaison personnel.**
6. What can the student population do to help with this problem?

It is important for students to learn about mental illnesses and to recognize and report when a student is in need of some type of referral service. A good way for students to learn more about the issue could be during student orientation.

7. What is being done to get more funding for this MHMR crisis? When going out on a call, is this information (MHMR) a part of the call?

Officers receive information on certain addresses concerning past history of mental illness in CAD calls.

A. Funding

B. The dispatchers will put the information in the call if they have the information. This is to alert the officers of the situation before he gets there. Then the dispatchers will research the information in APD data base on the person for the responding officer.

8. What alternate methods are being utilized and/or developed to deal with individuals with a mental illness?

9. Would you consider implementing a county-wide peer to peer MH program for psychiatric rehabilitation & recovery reintegration?
10. It seems that many people – most of them poor or mentally ill– get railroaded into prison for crimes it turns out later they did not commit. What can we do to safeguard against this?
 - A. ***The agency would argue that the poor or mentally ill are not railroaded into prison for crimes they did not commit. The argument is that they commit the crimes without a full awareness of the laws they have violated***
11. Why are the overwhelming numbers of criminals on death row in Harris County African-American men?
12. At Austin State Hospital, staff is trained to use verbal skills to help de-escalate angry patients, thereby avoiding control battles and use of force. What kind of training does your staff receive in this area?
 - A. ***EVERY NEW Austin Police Officer receives 40 hours of mental health training during the academy. A number of uniform police officers additionally receive mental health officer's certification through a supplemental TCLEOS MHO Course***
13. What about community-based supports for consumers as opposed to institutions? Please be encouraged to learn more about recovery and ways to support consumers to live productive lives within their own communities.
14. Are there special services offered to APD and Sheriff Personnel who have experienced combat, to handle PTSD symptoms?
 - A. ***PTSD is fairly new for the organization and the agency is in a learning stage on this mental condition. More research is needed in this area to promote the awareness of the disorder. We have not yet got a grasp of PTSD. Currently the Staff Psychologist is aware of the condition looks for this condition during the hiring process. For current personnel we have the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). This program allow employees to seek support and counseling in a private setting***