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Whitestown Fire Department partners with local autism center to provide comfort kits

Whitestown, Ind. – The Whitestown Fire Department (WFD) has partnered with the Behavior Analysis Center for Autism (BACA) to develop comfort kits to help children with autism during emergency situations.

“Emergencies are already tense and stressful. Having comfort kits will help our first responders when they respond to a scene involving a child with autism,” said Whitestown Fire Chief Josh Westrich. “We partnered with BACA, located here in Whitestown, to develop autism comfort kits to bring a sense of calm amid a chaotic situation.”

About 1 in 54 children has been identified with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) according to estimates from CDC’s Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network.

Children with autism can become overwhelmed while interacting with first responders during emergency situations. Items in the kit help to keep the child calm and reduce noise, a common stressor for those with autism, in addition to aiding them in communicating with first responders.

“When choosing items to include in the comfort kits, we focused on items that would provide an escape, serve as a distraction, and provide comfort,” said Roudebush. “Senses are often heightened for individuals with an ASD diagnosis, so we wanted to consider audible, visual, tactile, etc.”

The three kits currently being utilized by WFD include items such as noise cancelling headphones and sunglasses to combat some of the unpleasant sights and sounds present during emergency situations. Also included are sensory toys that can serve as preferred items, and a weighted blanket, which can be very soothing.

“It is essential for first responders to understand autism and be prepared to respond effectively and safely,” said Chief Westrich. “We are grateful for BACA’s assistance not only in creating the comfort kits, but also in developing a training video for our team to utilize them.”

“The comfort kits will be an invaluable tool to the Whitestown Fire Department,” said Roudebush. “Truthfully, any child would likely enjoy these items, especially during a potentially scary situation. My hope is that this will set an example for other departments to follow.”

About Whitestown, Indiana

Whitestown, Indiana has been the fastest growing community in the state of Indiana for the past eight years. Located near Interstate 65, Whitestown is a convenient 20-minute drive from Indianapolis. More than 8,000 residents call Whitestown home. For more information, visit www.whitestown.in.gov.

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NOTE TO THE EDITOR: Below is a photo of an autism comfort kit utilized by the Whitestown Fire Department.

