Your Rights During Police Contact

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What you can and can't do, what the officer is doing, and how to use the three steps in a high-pressure encounter.

> **This guide is general information, not legal advice.** Laws differ by state and situation. It cannot tell you what to do in your own encounter. If you have a case or a question about your own situation, talk to a lawyer.

THREE SENTENCES

Memorize these exactly. Under pressure, people reach for memorized words or nothing at all.

> ***"Am I free to go?"***
>
> ***"I don't consent to searches."***
>
> ***"I want a lawyer."***

Say them calmly, and say them once. Repeating is fine. Raising your voice is not.

"I want a lawyer" is the strongest of the three. It does not need to be explained or justified. After you say it, stop talking. The silence afterward is the hardest part, and the silence is the point.

None of these three sentences make you look guilty. All three are ordinary.

HARD THINGS THAT ARE TRUE

Don't run	Freezing and running are involuntary for a lot of people. The consequences are severe anyway.
Announce before you reach	"It's in my pocket — can I get it?" Even for something you were asked for.
Don't argue the law there	The scene is never where that gets resolved.
Don't fill the silence	Over-explaining is the most common way people in our classes get hurt. Talking more does not help.

HOW YOU MIGHT GET READ WRONG

None of this is your fault. Knowing it happens is the leverage you have.

WHAT'S HAPPENING FOR YOU	HOW IT CAN GET READ
Looking away to think or settle yourself	Shifty, lying
Taking time to answer	Making something up
Flat voice or flat face under stress	Cold, no remorse, high
Rocking, pacing, fidgeting	Agitated, on something
Answering only what was asked	Hiding something
Talking fast, explaining a lot	Nervous, guilty
Going quiet	Refusing to cooperate

Circle the ones that are you. That is the list to be aware of.

SHOULD YOU SAY YOU'RE NEURODIVERGENT?

This is a genuinely hard call and there is no universal right answer. We are not going to tell you which way to go.

It may help	It can explain your behavior in the moment. Some agencies have training or protocols.
It may not	It can be disbelieved, ignored, treated as an excuse, or written down in a way you did not expect.

> **Decide in advance, not in the moment.** A decision made under that much stress is not really a decision.
>
> Some options: a card in your wallet · a note on your phone lock screen · a medical alert item · or one memorized sentence — *"I have a disability that affects how I communicate."*

My decision: _____

AFTERWARD IS WHERE YOU HAVE POWER

You cannot control the encounter. You can control the next twenty minutes.

— **Write down everything you remember — today**, while it's fresh

— Names, badge numbers, times, place, who else saw it

— Photograph anything visible

— **Do not post about it**

— **Do not discuss the facts with anyone except a lawyer**

Build the note now, before you need it. Open your phone's notes app and make a blank note titled “If something happens.” Put these headings in it: date · time · where · who was there · what was said · what I did · names and badge numbers · witnesses.

THE THREE STEPS

Recognize	This is one of the moments that carries legal weight.
Stop	Nothing gets signed, said, or ignored right now.
Escalate	Call the person on my card.

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