 Individuals with disabilities may be abused in their homes, institutions, medical settings, on buses or taxis, in schools or on the street.

People with all types of disabilities are at higher risk and experience higher rates of violence because perpetrators seek vulnerable victims that are:

- Easier to assault,
- Less likely to report, and
- Less likely to be believed.

Statistics to consider

- According to three separate studies, as many as 40%, 75%, and 97% of assaults went unreported (Criminal Justice and Behavior, Vol. 28, No. 6, 2001)
- 97% to 99% of abusers are known and trusted by the victim who has developmental disabilities (Sexuality and Disability, Vol. 9, No. 4, 1991)
- A barrier to reporting caregiver abuse could mean being placed in an institution, because other personal assistance is not available.

Impact for persons with disabilities

- Existing physical and mental health problems may be increased.
- A person with disabilities may already experience discrimination, and experience low self-esteem and self-doubt, which may be intensified.
- One person hurt is one too many.

Cindy’s Story

Types of Abuse and Signs that it is happening

- Financial/Economic
- Neglect
- Emotional
- Verbal
- Physical
- Sexual
Financial Abuse/Economic Control
- Stealing or helping oneself to another’s possessions without permission
- Not treating reports of theft seriously
- Borrowing from one resident for another resident without permission
- Not returning proper change after making purchases
- Forcing people to pay for food for someone else

Financial Abuse Indicators
- Missing checks or credit cards
- Missing clothing
- Missing valuables
- Missing food or other personal belongings
- No spending money
- Bills for items the person didn’t buy

Neglect
- Withholding food, medicine or other items needed
- Not assisting when you know someone needs help
- Ignoring or postponing calls for help
- Forgetting or delaying help with eating, drinking, bathroom assistance, etc
- Leaving essentials out of reach (water, dentures, walker, call button, etc)

Neglect Indicators
- Loss of weight
- Dirt under the fingernails, matted hair, body odor, or heavily soiled or stained clothes
- Reduced ability to walk
- Skin sores, rashes or other type of breakouts
- Symptoms of over or under medication
- Psychological indicators including withdrawal, change in behavior, depression, agitation, anger or demanding behavior

Emotional Abuse
- Threatening with punishment if they do not behave
- Talking to about person as if they are not there
- Using demeaning language or ridicule
- Prohibiting free choice
- Not allowing to participate in activities
- Ignoring questions or comments
- Exposing body without concern for privacy

Verbal Abuse
- Yelling
- Screaming
- Name calling
- Teasing
- Use of profanity
- Blaming
- Judgmental
Verbal and Emotional Indicators
- Changes in behavior - sudden or gradual over time
- Seemingly unjustified fear
- Unwarranted suspicion
- Denial of situation
- New or unexplained depression
- Lack of interest
- Change in activity level

Physical Abuse
- Hitting
- Beating
- Shoving
- Striking with object
- Squeezing roughly
- Scratching
- Biting
- Pinching
- Using overly hot or cold water
- Slapping
- Punching
- Spitting
- Pulling/twisting
- Tripping
- Burning
- Improper use of restraints
- Improper use of meds

Physical Abuse Indicators
- Bruises
- Swelling
- Change in walking
- Withdrawal
- Change in behavior
- Unusual fear
- Skin tears or cuts
- Limbs out of place
- Scratches
- Burns
- Unexpected depression
- Denial of situation

Sexual Abuse
- Fondling of another's private parts without consent
- Intimate touching of private parts during bathing
- Unwanted sexual advances or activity
- Any sexual activity that occurs when one or both parties do not consent

Sexual Abuse
- Sexual harassment
- Any sexual activity between a paid care provider and the client
- Unwanted sexual talk
- Unwanted sexual imagery or pornography
- Photographs
- Films
- Video taping

Signs & Indicators of Sexual Abuse
- Physical:
  - Cuts and bruises
  - Difficulty in walking or sitting
  - Dirty or disheveled appearance
  - Skin breakouts, sore or lesions
  - Weight changes
  - Soreness, bruising, or bleeding genital area
  - Unusual discharge from genitalia or STI
  - Torn or bloody underwear
Signs & Indicators of Sexual Abuse

- Psychological
  - Withdrawal, depression or suicide
  - Sudden change in behavior
  - Non-compliance or overly willing to please
  - Change in sleeping or eating patterns
  - Erratic behavior (aggressive, angry or agitated)
  - Anger issues, difficulty controlling temper
  - Doesn’t want to be touched
  - Unusual sexual behavior, expression or talk

Care Provider Responsibilities and Mandatory Reporting

- Talk about abuse
  - Help them to understand abuse
  - Ask about abuse and believe what they say
  - Let them know they can trust you
- Recognize and look for signs of abuse
- Provide help
  - Make sure they are safe
  - Direct them to services and resources
  - Report responsibly

(Courtesy of Temple University, PA)

Utah Mandatory Reporting Requirements Regarding Elderly/Disabled

- Must report if there is a reason to believe that a vulnerable adult has been subjected to abuse, neglect or exploitation
- A “vulnerable adult” is an adult 65 years of age or older, or an adult who has a mental or physical impairment which substantially affects that person’s ability to:
  - Provide personal protection
  - Provide necessities such as food, shelter, clothing, or mental or other health care
  - Obtain services necessary for health, safety, or welfare
  - Carry out the activities of daily living
  - Manage the adult’s own resources
  - Comprehend the nature and consequences of remaining in a situation of abuse, neglect, or exploitation

To Report or Not to Report?

- The victim has the right to have control over this process. However, there will be some instances where mandatory reporting is required.
- Mandatory reporting laws can be overwhelming and confusing. You can always contact your local law enforcement officer for clarification or contact the 24-Hour Confidential Rape and Sexual Assault Crisis and Information Line at 1.888.421.1100 or the Statewide Domestic Violence LINK Line at 1.800.897.LINK (5465).
What to Do if you Suspect Abuse

- Contact the authorities immediately
- Utah Aging and Adult Services: 1.800.371.7897
- Utah Child Abuse/Neglect Hotline: 1.855.323.3237
- 24-Hour Statewide Sexual Assault Crisis and Information Line: 1.888.421.1100
- 24-Hour Statewide Domestic Violence LINK Line: 1.800.897.5465

Mandatory Reporting: Explaining

- Explain to the person about how you will report, to whom, why, and what will happen.
- Offer them the opportunity to be involved in the process.
- Even if mandatory reporting is required, the victim should be aware of the process and who will know their information to greatest extent possible.

What Else Can You Do?

- Have patience with the process.
- Believe the victims! Do not question accuracy.
- Validate the victims' feelings and affirm the courageous act of reaching out to you.
- Tell the victims they are not alone.
- EMPOWER THEM! Let them decide their own healing process while you support them along the way.

Thank You!

- For more information, please contact Deborah Dilley at the Utah Coalition Against Sexual Assault (801-746-0404), Hilde Koenig at the Utah Domestic Violence Coalition (801-521-5544), Camille Coon at the Disability Law Center (801-363-1347) or Marilyn Hammond at the Center for Persons with Disabilities (435-797-3811).
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