

Basic Principles of Self-Protection

Have a clear understanding of healthy sexual expression. Generally know what is exploitative or harmful. Be aware that sexual contact as a condition of service provision or by service providers is abuse.

Be aware that everyone has a right to some privacy. Your body, personal details about yourself, etc. do not need to be discussed or displayed in a manner that is embarrassing or without dignity.

You have a right to say “NO” to touch that makes you feel uncomfortable. You can say ‘no’ even to someone who you love or someone who provides care for you.

Seek out someone you trust who has the time to listen. Tell this person anytime someone is bothering you or if you need help deciding if a situation is okay or not.

Know your personal rights. Nobody has a right to touch you if you do not want them to. You have a right to be safe in your home, at work, and safe in the community.

Feel good about yourself. Know that you are special and powerful. You can stop or report someone who tries to make you feel differently.

Statistics

It is estimated that approximately 67% of perpetrators who abused individuals with severe cognitive disabilities accessed them through their work in disability services (Sobsey,1991).

A number of small scale studies suggest that 39% - 68% of girls and 16% - 30% of boys with developmental disabilities will be sexually abused before the age of 18 (Sobsey,1996).

Resources:

The Texas Department of Human Services
Long Term Care Regulatory Hotline
1-800-458-9858

The Abuse Hotline of the Texas Department of
Protective and Regulatory Services
1-800-252-5400

SafePlace
Disabilities Services ASAP
P.O Box 19454
Austin, TX 78760
512-267-SAFE
TTY 512-927-9616
www.austin-safeplace.org

How can incest survivors find help in their recovery?

Sexual assault programs in Texas can provide counseling for survivors or help them find resources. Contact TAASA or your local center for more information. To report abuse or neglect call Child Protective Services or Adult Protective Services at 800-252-5400, your local police, or sheriff’s department.

TAASA

Texas Association Against Sexual Assault
7701 North Lamar, Ste 104
Austin, TX 78752

Phone: 512-474-7190
Fax: 512-474-6490
www.taasa.org

TAASA

Sexual Abuse of People with Developmental Disabilities

Join TAASA in the campaign to end sexual assault.



www.taasa.org

The Issues

Studies have consistently shown that 65% - 85% of adults with developmental disabilities have been sexually abused. Much of this abuse begins in childhood and continues into adulthood.

The overwhelming majority of the abusers are well-known to the victim. Common abusers include family members, acquaintances, and paid caregivers.

Why are people with developmental disabilities more at risk?

- they may have a variety of care providers and may be reliant on ph
- are frequently taught to be compliant requests from caregivers it
- often isolated or living in insti o
- have not typically received appropriate sexuality education which a healthy sex
- may not have been allowed privacy had the chance to learn about ar
- may have limited communication therefore making it harder to cl
- often not believed or viewed as

Perpetrators of abuse against a developmentally delayed individual have little fear of consequences because many cases go both undetected and unreported. This increases the likelihood that the abuse will be repeated, many times over a period of months or years.

Avoiding Sexual Abuse

Parents and caregivers must learn to identify and prevent sexual abuse. They need to learn to detect subtle changes in mood, tone, or behavior to assure that any potential abuse does not escalate or continue.

Sexually abused persons may demonstrate the following behaviors

- seem fearful of a particular person
- resist physical exams
- have added difficulties in school or social situations
- sleep disturbances or nightmares
- depression
- increased sexual “acting out” behavior
- regression to childlike behaviors
- new or increased interest in sexual issues

A major obstacle to detecting sexual abuse in this population is the fact that the common symptoms of sexual abuse are often overlooked and attributed to the victim’s disability. Do not dismiss suspicious events or behavior as being part of the disability.

Symptoms to look for in a living environment:

- lack of privacy and dignity for the resident
- the expectation of complete compliance as a condition of residence
- high client-to-staff ratio, which limits supervision and opportunities for disclosure
- staff without a positive attitude towards the residents
- institutional settings that cluster potentially sexually aggressive and vulnerable individuals together
- loose standards for “therapeutic restraint”

How Can You Help Make it Safer?

- Support the individual in finding activities that he or she enjoys and which can boost self-esteem.
- Make sure a facility carefully screens staff before employment.
- Choose a facility that supports regular visits by outside Client Advocacy agencies.
- Be certain that appropriate sexuality education is taught. Do not assume that it’s not necessary even if it makes you uncomfortable.
- Be available to talk in a relaxed manner on a regular basis.
- Teach that there are some valid situations for noncompliance.
- Provide support for positive, healthy relationships with romantic partners.

Abused children usually believe that their abuse is the result of something they did or that they deserve to be abused for some reason. They may also believe that all families are like theirs...that children are commonly abused by older family members and forced to keep the abuse a secret.

Teaching Self-Protection

Any program of defensive strategies for people with developmental disabilities should also acknowledge that they may still not be able to prevent the abuse and the sole responsibility of what happens falls on the perpetrator. Be very careful that it is not implied that if you are abused, you must not have followed the rules.

People with developmental disabilities can learn skills that will reduce their vulnerability to sexual abuse. When introducing personal safety concepts it is important to gauge your presentation to the age, type of disability, and the learning style of the audience. Verbalize your instructions/ideas appropriately. Stick with the concrete, avoid the abstract. Break down complex ideas into smaller, clearer notions. Check frequently to make sure your message is being received as intended.