

All about Assault Prevention

This tip sheet accompanies the presentation “All about Assault Prevention.”

Assault happens in the DD population

Data shows that:

- The rate of violence against people with developmental disabilities is nearly three times higher than for those without a disability.
- Individuals with a cognitive (intellectual) disability have a rate of violent victimization higher than any other type of disability.
- In California, over half of reported incidents of abuse (July 2014 – June 2016) were cases of physical violence.

Your personal commitment to the provision of a safe, stable, and nurturing environment is essential and must be very visible. Protection of the people you support starts with your leadership, which is demonstrated through the quality of your interactions with the individuals you support.

Why are individuals with developmental disabilities susceptible to abuse?

Individuals with developmental disabilities are more susceptible to abuse for many reasons. Some of these reasons are that they:

- May have limited communication abilities and/or cognitive disabilities that make it difficult to report abuse.
- May be seen by the abuser as weak, vulnerable, or less likely to report abuse, making them easy targets.
- May be more likely to be abused by someone they know – a caregiver or someone involved in their daily routine.
- May be easily influenced by and eager to please others, thinking that the abuser is a “friend.”
- May think that how they have been treated is normal.

What are the signs that may indicate that an individual is being harmed by someone?

Some physical signs are:

- Bruises
- Cuts
- Scrapes
- Other injuries

Some behavioral signs are:

- Concealing injuries
- Having a questionable explanation for injuries
- Isolating themselves from family and friends
- Spending a lot of money or often having little money
- Having low self-esteem

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- Having sudden changes in behavior
- Drinking too much alcohol
- Using drugs
- Showing symptoms of depression and/or suicidal tendencies

These signs may indicate possible harm to an individual. Any of these may be a reason for concern even if it is not related to an individual being harmed.

What can you do to prevent or stop an individual from being harmed?

To prepare for violent situations with the individuals you support:

1. **Create an assault prevention plan.** With the individual you support, make a plan of steps to prevent assault and to get out of violent situations. Examples of ideas to include in the plan are below:
 - Always know where the exits are.
 - Never go into a room alone with someone you don't know.
 - Make sure you have your phone in case you need to call for help.
 - If you can't leave the building, lock yourself in a safe room and then call for help.

To identify and approach an individual who has experienced violence and to prevent it from reoccurring:

1. **Watch for the signs** that an individual is being harmed.
2. **Talk to the individual one-on-one and encourage open communication** if you suspect that they are being harmed. When approaching the individual, it is essential to create a non-judgmental environment where the individual may feel more comfortable talking to you. Often people do not report because they do not think others will believe them.
3. **Provide care and support for victims of violence.** Often abuse goes unreported because victims fear the abuser will be in a position to do more harm. Offer your help and provide resources and solutions to the individual.
4. If there has been a physical or verbal attack, **make sure the person is safe and report the incident to the respective agencies.** Look at what has happened and take necessary steps to prevent future violence.

To de-escalate a potentially violent situation between an individual and another person:

1. **Intervene** in a potentially violent interaction between an individual and another person by:
 - **Distracting:** Ask questions to divert attention of either the individual or other person. Examples include asking for directions, the time, help, etc.

- **Directly approaching the situation:** Approach either the individual or other person and express your concern. When approaching the individual, show your support and offer your help. Be careful of escalating the situation when approaching the other person. They could direct their violence toward you or other people.
- **Delegating:** If you do not know the individual or other person, ask for help from other people, such as security guards, police, other supporters, etc., who may be more helpful and appropriate for resolving the situation.

For more information on reporting abuse, go to:

- <https://www.purdue.edu/timely-warnings/safety-tips/aggravated-assault.html>
- <https://www.dds.ca.gov/services/dspt/year-1-2-trainer-and-student-resource-guides/>
- <http://www.calcasa.org/wp-content/uploads/files/angie-blumel-advocate-guide-safety-planning-final-printer.pdf>
- <https://www.thehotline.org/is-this-abuse/domestic-violence-disabilities-2/>