

## Conversation Guide for Talking About Abuse

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Talking with people about sensitive topics such as abuse can be very challenging. The following conversation guide is meant to be a tool to assist direct support professionals (DSPs) when having difficult talks with the individuals they support.

### Knowing the Facts

Before having a conversation about abuse, it is important to seek out and understand relevant information on the topic. Here are a few of the facts:

- Over 90 percent of survivors of abuse with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) know their abusers<sup>1</sup>.
- About half of abusers had a relationship with the victim specifically related to their disability (i.e., long-term care facility staff, transportation providers)<sup>2</sup>.
- Abuse survivors with disabilities often experience multiple instances of abuse, including abuse extending over time, compared to people without disabilities<sup>3</sup>.
- Abuse can happen to anyone regardless of gender or age.

### How to Support an Individual That You Are Concerned About

#### Talk to a Supervisor

- Talk to someone you trust in your profession about your suspicions and plan for actions to take.

#### Bring the Issue Up with the Individual

- Ask the individual you suspect is being abused about how the suspected abuser treats them.
  - Be sure to have this conversation in a safe setting.

### Barriers Faced by Survivors with Disabilities

Survivors with disabilities may face additional barriers when attempting to access help, including the following:

- Support responses to address the abuse may be ineffective, and/or inappropriate from the community and/or provider organizations.
- There may be a lack of available resources and/or accommodations from service providers.
- Unfamiliar language and/or communication needs could make it challenging for care professionals to understand the individual.
- Individuals with I/DD can be disbelieved when reporting abuse.
  - Don't assume, based on ability level, that an individual is mistaken.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://pcar.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdfs/tab\\_2019\\_supporting\\_survivors\\_with\\_idd\\_508.pdf](https://pcar.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdfs/tab_2019_supporting_survivors_with_idd_508.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.thearc.org/document.doc%3Fid%3D5145>

<sup>3</sup> [https://pcar.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdfs/tab\\_2019\\_supporting\\_survivors\\_with\\_idd\\_508.pdf](https://pcar.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdfs/tab_2019_supporting_survivors_with_idd_508.pdf)

## Conversation Tips

It is important to use care when having conversations about abuse with individuals with disabilities. Here are a few tips:

- Make sure the conversation happens in a safe space.
- Use clear definitions and accessible language throughout the conversation.
- Believe survivors of abuse – take all reports seriously.
- Notify and report to appropriate agencies to get help.
  - Don't discredit the voices of individuals with I/DD as unbelievable.
- Offer support and resources in conjunction with the conversation.
  - It is important to have resources at the ready and a plan to support survivors already prepared.

## Questions to Ask a Survivor of Abuse with I/DD

### Breaking the Ice

- “What can I do to make you feel more comfortable/safe while we talk today?”
- “How are you feeling in general right now? How are you feeling emotionally? Physically?”
- “Do you need me to get you any communication aids to help us talk freely and for you to feel comfortable today?”

### Leaving an Abusive Situation

- “Are you thinking about leaving the relationship? Have you thought about how to stay safe when leaving the abusive situation?”
- “Where do you think you could go when you leave, and how do you think you'll get there?”
- “Who are the people that you know and trust who could help you leave/get out of the abusive situation?”

### Staying Safe

- “What are your current safety worries? What are your safety worries for the future?”
- “What places in your community feel safe for you to go? Where do you feel unsafe? What steps can you take to feel protected in those spaces?”
- “Do you have friends or a counselor you can talk to?”
- “What is your biggest concern about staying safe from your abuser? What can you do to manage that concern?”

### Assistance Needs

- “What types of assistive technology are useful to you, and how can the devices you need be safeguarded?”
- “What resources would be helpful for you to feel safer?”
- “What resources would be helpful for you to develop a safety plan for now and the future?”

## Additional Resource:

- <http://www.calcasa.org/wp-content/uploads/files/angie-blumel-advocate-guide-safety-planning-final-printer.pdf>