

Sexual Abuse and the Developmentally Disabled

Trends, signs, risk factors, and what
can be done.

Sexual Abuse and the Developmentally Disabled

- According to the 2012 Census Report, there were 1 – 2 million adults with an intellectual disability (.5%), 944,000 adults with a developmental disability (.4%), and 5.2 million children under the age of 15 (8.4%) with a disability.²

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- More than 90% of people with developmental disabilities will experience sexual abuse at some point and 49% will experience 10 or more abusive incidents (Valenti-Hein & Schwartz, 1995).⁹

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- 39% to 68% of girls and 16% to 30% of boys with developmental disabilities will be sexually abused before their eighteenth birthday (Sobsey, 1994).⁷

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- 15,000 to 19,000 people with developmental disabilities are raped each year in the United States (Sobsey, 1994).⁷

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- Where is sexual abuse most likely to occur and by whom?

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- Research suggests that 97 to 99% of abusers are known and trusted by the victim who has developmental disabilities (Baladerian, 1991).¹
- According to Sobsey & Doe, 1991⁸ the abuse comes from:

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- Service providers 28%
- Acquaintances or neighbors 15.22%
- Informal paid providers (babysitters) 9.8%
- Natural or step-family 9%
- Dates 3.8%

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- A study involving 171 cases of sexual assault on people with developmental disabilities documented 42% of the abusers also had a developmental disability (Furey, Granfield, and Karan, 1994).³

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- Females are more at risk than males. A study by D. Sobsey and T. Doe in 1991 found that 81.7% of the victims were female and 90.8% of the perpetrators were male.⁸

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- Only three percent of sexual abuse cases involving people with developmental disabilities will ever be reported (Valenti-Hein & Schwartz, 1995).⁹

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- Education for staff is an important step in preventing sexual abuse.

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Key points to consider when teaching sexual abuse prevention (especially if individuals have severely limited communication skills) are:

- Recognizing signs of potential sexual abuse
- Recognizing signs of a potential sexual abuser
- Reporting requirements

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Signs of potential sexual abuse of individuals⁷ include:

- Signs of physical abuse
- Torn clothing
- Bruises in the genital area or genital discomfort
- Avoidance of certain settings
- Withdrawal
- Emergence of new or inappropriate sexual behavior

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Signs of a possible sexual abuser⁷ include:

- Alcohol or drug abuse
- Seeks isolated contact with individuals
- Socially isolated

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- Staff seeking isolated contact with individuals should be of concern. Examples of seeking isolated contact may include:

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- Seems preoccupied with checking incontinent individuals for peri-care needs.
- Regularly volunteers to take an individual on an outing alone (e.g., to the store or for coffee).

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- What should be done if sexual abuse is suspected ?

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- Make sure the individual is safe from further abuse.
- If you suspect sexual abuse has occurred, report it to the administrator or AOD immediately.
- If you suspect a rape has occurred, notify authorities and the administrator immediately.
- Secure the crime scene by not allowing access to it.

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- Report abuse or suspected abuse of a child to Child Protection.
- The following web address will provide phone numbers in your area (Idaho only):

<http://healthandwelfare.idaho.gov/Children/AbuseNeglect/ChildProtectionContactPhoneNumbers/tabid/475/Default.aspx>

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Report abuse or suspected abuse of an adult to Adult Protection (Idaho only) at:

- Coeur d'Alene area – 667-3179
- Lewiston area – 743-5580
- Boise area – 991-5640
- Twin Falls area – 736-2122
- Pocatello area – 233-4032
- Idaho Falls area – 522-5391

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- Idaho Statute⁴ states reporting of abuse, abandonment or neglect. "(1) Any physician, resident on a hospital staff, intern, nurse, coroner, school teacher, day care personnel, social worker, or other person having reason to believe that a child under the age of eighteen (18) years has been abused, abandoned or neglected or who observes the child being subjected to conditions or circumstances which would reasonably result in abuse, abandonment or neglect shall report or cause to be reported within twenty-four (24) hours such conditions or circumstances to the proper law enforcement agency or the department."

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- Idaho Code⁶ defines adult abuse, neglect or abandonment and defines the state agencies responsible for taking and investigating adult abuse reports. Adult abuse reports are taken by the local Agency on Aging offices.

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- A report should be made if you see evidence of physical abuse, neglect, self neglect, exploitation, or abandonment of a vulnerable adult.
- Vulnerable adults are people 18 years of age or older who are unable to protect themselves from abuse, neglect or exploitation due to physical or mental impairment which affects judgment or behavior to the extent that sufficient understanding or capacity to make or communicate or implement decisions is lacking.

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- Failure to report as required by the reporting law is a misdemeanor in Idaho.

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- Idaho Statute⁵ states Punishment for a misdemeanor. “(1) Except in cases where a different punishment is prescribed in this code, every offense declared to be a misdemeanor, is punishable by imprisonment in a county jail not exceeding six (6) months, or by a fine not exceeding one thousand dollars (\$1,000), or by both.”

References

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