

Abuse of People with Disabilities

Fact Sheet

This booklet is about abuse of adults with disabilities. It explains what abuse is, and what you can do about it.

Anyone can experience abuse. Knowledge is the key to preventing abuse. When you know about abuse you are in a better position to stay safe.

Here are some things that may put people with disabilities at risk of abuse:

- People may have negative attitudes about disability.
- You may be isolated from other people because of the disability.
- Another person may be making decisions for you.
- You may need to rely on others for the necessities of life, including intimate personal care.

What is abuse?

Abuse is anything that causes harm to an individual. Abuse can be physical, sexual, psychological/emotional, or economic/financial. Abuse of people with disabilities, like all forms of abuse, is an abuse of power and control.

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Physical abuse: intentionally causing a person pain or injury.

Common examples:

- hitting, kicking or pinching
- handling someone roughly, slapping them
- giving inappropriate medication
- confining people or using restraints — tying the person to a bed or a chair

Sexual abuse: forcing someone to have sex. It includes kissing or touching as well as intercourse.

Psychological/emotional abuse : behaviour that takes away someone's dignity and self worth.

Common examples:

- calling someone names or putting them down
- isolating or ignoring them
- threatening to remove benefits, services, medication, treatment etc.
- threatening to destroy pets or personal belongings
- removing aids (such as a wheelchair or communication device)
- threatening to send the person to an institution

Economic/financial abuse : controlling another person's finances without permission.

Common examples:

- withholding money for basic necessities such as food, clothing, medication, and transportation
- preventing someone from getting to work or denying access to employment altogether
- depriving someone of financial benefits

- taking the money needed for food and shelter and gambling it away or using it to buy drugs, etc.

Neglect: this happens when caregivers do not meet the needs of people they serve. A caregiver can be someone who is paid to help or a family member.

Neglect may involve not giving someone food, care, or necessary medication. It is also neglect when someone doesn't stop another person from being abused.

Common examples

- not providing enough to eat or drink
- not providing appropriate supervision
- not providing enough heat/electricity
- not providing appropriate personal care
- removing dentures, glasses, hearing aids
- allowing the person to develop skin conditions or pressure sores
- leaving the person's medical problems untreated

Systemic abuse: Systemic abuse refers to practices that take away a person's independence and dignity. Systemic abuse happens in settings where other people are making decisions for the person who has a disability. Government bodies and bureaucrats can also be involved in systemic abuse.

Institutional abuse : This is a form of systemic abuse. In institutional settings, power imbalances often exist between service providers and people they serve. Research has shown that people with disabilities who live in institutions are more likely to experience abuse than those who live in the community.

What can you do?

There are places that can help. When you contact them, let them know what your access and communication needs are.

- Talk to a trusted family member or friend.
- Phone 911 if your safety is at risk.

What happens: Police will come to where you are. They will investigate what happened and make sure you are safe. They may arrest the abuser if there is good reason to do so.

- **Call VictimLINK.** Telephone: BC Toll Free 1 800 563-0808, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Deaf and hard of hearing people can contact VictimLINK via the TTY service at 604 875-0885; to call collect, please call the Telus Relay Service at 711.

What happens: You talk to a victim service worker about your safety and your legal options. You make the decisions about what should happen next.

- If you are a woman who is being abused by a partner, call VictimLINK for the number of a shelter or transition house.

What happens: Transition house or shelter staff can provide information and support. You may be able to stay at the shelter for a short time.

- What if the abuser is a caregiver? Call VictimLINK. Ask for the name of the person at the “designated agency” in your area who is responsible under the Adult Guardianship Act.

What happens: Someone from the agency will come and meet with you. They will explain the options for your safety and legal protection. You make the decisions. The agency has the authority to take action to stop the abuse.

What if someone you know is being abused?

If someone you know is being abused, they need information and support to make their own decisions. No one should have to deal with abuse alone.

Let them know:

- the abuse is not their fault
- nobody deserves abuse
- you care and are ready to listen and help

How are people protected from abuse?

- The law prohibits abuse. Forms of abuse include assault, sexual assault, criminal harassment, intimidation and theft. The abuser could be charged with the crime and tried in court.
- Transition houses provide shelter and emotional support to women and children who experience abuse. Some transition houses have services for older women and for people with caregivers.
- The courts can make orders that protect your safety and security. Typically they order the abuser to have no contact with you.
- If the abuser is a caregiver, the BC **Public Guardian and Trustee** has the authority to intervene. For example, they can go to court and obtain an order to get past a suspected abuser to talk to the person about the abuse.
- The BC **Victims of Crime Act** provides rights to victims of crime, including the right to be treated with courtesy, respect, and without discrimination by all justice personnel. The BC **Crime Victim Assistance Act** provides eligible victims injured as a result of certain crimes with financial assistance and/or benefits.

VictimLINK has information about these and other services for people who experience abuse.

Ways to assert your own dignity and power

Abusers aim to exercise power and control over others. Ways to assert your own dignity and power include:

- being involved with other people and being active in the community
- taking as much control over your life as you can
- getting information about your rights

In all of your relationships, let people know that you expect:

- to be treated with respect
- to be able to communicate with others
- to have a place where you can live in safety
- to feel welcome in the community
- to be able to plan for the future
- to have caregivers who know how to put themselves in your shoes
- to have advocates who know what it is like to have to rely on the system
- to be able to complain if abuse happens, and have your complaints taken seriously and acted upon.

Abuse Prevention Information Sites

VICTIM SERVICES

Call **VictimLINK**. Telephone: BC Toll Free 1 800 563-0808, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Deaf and hard of hearing people can contact VictimLINK via the TTY service at 604 875-0885; to call collect, please call the Telus Relay Service at 711.

DISABILITY SITES

BC Coalition of People with Disabilities

<http://www.bccpd.ca>

BC umbrella disability rights group. They can direct you to other disability resources in the province

#204 - 456 West Broadway

Vancouver BC V5Y 1R3

Tel: 604-875-0188; TTY: 604-875-8835;

Fax: 604-875-9227

DisAbled Women's Network (DAWN)

<http://www.dawncanada.net>

Deals with violence and abuse against women with disabilities. Will link you with provincial DAWN groups.

Disability Weblinks

<http://www.disabilityweblinks.ca/>

Enablelink

<http://www.enablelink.org/>

Council of Canadians with Disabilities (CCD)

<http://www.pcs.mb.ca/~ccd/>

The Roeher Institute

<http://www.roeher.ca/>

ADVOCACY RESOURCES

ARCH: A Legal Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities

<http://www.arch-online.org>

An Ontario-based legal clinic and legal resource centre.

425 Bloor Street East, Suite 110

Toronto, Ontario M4W 3R5

Phone 416-482-8255; Fax 416- 482-2981;

TTY 416- 482-1254

BC Association for Community Living

<http://www.bcacl.org>

Focuses on the rights of adults and children who have a developmental disability.

#300 - 30 East 6th Avenue

Vancouver, B.C. V5T 4P4

Phone: 604-875-1119; Fax: 604-875-6744

BC Coalition to Eliminate Abuse of Seniors

<http://www.bcceas.ca>

Focuses on the elimination of abuse of seniors. Provides information, advocacy, resources.

#304 – 5050 Kingsway

Burnaby, BC V5H 4C2

Phone: 604-437-1940; Fax: 604-437-1929;

Toll Free 1-866-437-1940

Office of the Public Guardian and Trustee of British Columbia

www.trustee.bc.ca

The Public Guardian and Trustee upholds an adult's right to self-determination and provides support and protection for those vulnerable to abuse.

#700-808 West Hastings Street

Vancouver, British Columbia V6C 3L3

For services to adults, contact:

Phone: 604-775-0202; Fax: 604-660-4493

Shelternet

<http://www.shelternet.ca>

An online Canada-wide resource to help abused women and children find shelter, safety, and information about their options.

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