

# How can I

## Protect Myself?

- ✓ You have the **right to be safe** and to be treated with respect.
- ✓ You have the **right to decide** who will touch your body, and how and when it happens.
- ✓ Remember that you have the **right to say “no”** to any unwanted touch, **even** from a boyfriend or girlfriend, caregiver, attendant, family member, health care provider or other person in your life.
- ✓ You have the **right to say STOP** to the touching whenever you want, even if it felt good at first.
- ✓ If someone hurts you, makes you feel bad about yourself, or touches you in a way you do not like, **tell someone you trust**. If the first person does not help, tell someone else!
- ✓ If someone you know takes your money or things, **they are not being a friend!** Tell someone you trust!
- ✓ Say **NO!** Then **GO TELL!**

## Who Can Help?

- ✓ Someone in your family
- ✓ Someone who helps you at work or at home
- ✓ Your doctor or therapist
- ✓ Someone at church

# Resources

- ✓ **My Florida Zero Tolerance Initiative:**  
<http://apd.myflorida.com/zero-tolerance/index.htm>
- ✓ **State of Oregon information website on disability and abuse:**  
<http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/spwpd/index.shtml>
- ✓ **Important numbers to report abuse:**
  - 911
  - Florida:  
1-800-96ABUSE (1-800-962-2873)  
TDD: 1-800-453-5145
  - Ohio  
1-266-313-6733  
Fax: 614-995-3822



Nisonger Center

### Information provided by:

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For more information or to order additional copies visit <http://ffcc.org> or <http://nisonger.osu.edu/bhip/>

# Abuse, Neglect, & Exploitation:

## How to Protect Yourself



**Be Healthy Information Program**  
for Children and Adults with Disabilities

# Personal Safety

## The Problem

People with disabilities, children, and the elderly are especially likely to be abused, neglected, and exploited.

Did you know that **almost 90% of children and adults with developmental disabilities are abused or exploited** at some point in their life?

People with disabilities are at risk because:

- ✓ They depend on others for basic needs
- ✓ They are taught to cooperate with “people in charge” like staff members
- ✓ They often live in group settings and can't choose roommates or caregivers

People with disabilities may not report abuse, neglect, or exploitation because they:

- ✓ Feel guilty, ashamed, and/or love for the person that hurt them
- ✓ Do not want to make the abuser mad or get them in trouble
- ✓ Do not know **how** to get help
- ✓ Do not even know they are being abused!

The abuser can be anyone but is usually someone the victim knows well, such as a caregiver, friend, family member, or spouse!

**Abuse can be physical, emotional, or sexual. Taking your money or things (Financial exploitation) is abuse too!**

## What Should I Look For?

### Signs of abuse or neglect:

- ✓ Bruises, cuts, burns, grip marks
- ✓ Any injury that is unusual, unexplained, or the explanation does not make sense
- ✓ Any injury that has not been properly treated (sometimes injuries are hidden on areas of the body normally covered by clothing)
- ✓ Genital pain or itching, or sexually transmitted diseases

### Also, pay attention to changes in behavior!

- ✓ Suddenly scared of certain people, a specific gender, or certain situations
- ✓ Sudden fear of bathing or toileting
- ✓ Changes in personal hygiene
- ✓ Sleep problems, nightmares
- ✓ Sudden use of rude, abusive, or threatening language
- ✓ Signs of helplessness, unwilling to talk openly, fear, depression, agitation, nervousness, or confusion
- ✓ Unusually disobedient or overly obedient behavior
- ✓ Sexually inappropriate behaviors, masturbation, or new interest in sex
- ✓ Hints about sexual activity and a new or detailed understanding of sexual behavior

## What

## Can I Do?

- ✓ If you have seen any of these signs and are concerned about someone you know, do not wait—do something!
- ✓ Document everything; bruises, cuts, scratches, etc...as soon as you notice it. Write down where on the body the injury is located, whether it is an old or new injury, and a possible explanation of how it happened.
- ✓ Take notes on any new or unusual patterns of behavior.
- ✓ Talk with someone you trust (like a supervisor or case manager).
- ✓ **Report your concern!** You could end terrible suffering and even save a life!

## Reporting Abuse & Exploitation

**Note:** If you know that a life is in immediate danger due to abuse, neglect, or exploitation, you should **call 911 before calling anyone else.**

- ✓ **Ohio residents:** Call the **MR/DD Abuse Hotline** at **1(866)313-6733** or send a **faxed statement** to the Abuse Hotline's statewide toll-free fax number, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, at 1-614-995-3866
- ✓ **Florida residents:** Call the **Florida Abuse Hotline**, a nationwide, toll-free telephone number, at **1(800)96-ABUSE** or 1(800)962-2873 (TDD: 1-800-453-5145)