

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

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For more information or to order additional copies visit <http://fffic.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)