

## How can domestic violence agencies better serve people with disabilities?

Ask everyone you serve the following question: "We are working to become more accessible. Will you need any assistance while receiving services from our agency?" If the person requires simpler language, ask "Will you need any extra help?" Listen to any instructions the person may give about how you can assist. Examples might include helping the person enter the building, providing large print materials, or requesting an assistive listening device during court procedures.

### **When serving a client with a disability, domestic violence advocates should follow these guidelines:**

- Regard the person as an equal individual. Reject the common view that a person with a disability needs to be "fixed" or pitied.
- Assume that all people with disabilities are capable. Help each person identify her/his strengths and capacities and build on them.
- Respect the person's struggle as well as her/his strength as a survivor.
- Allow the client to identify issues to address. Don't assume that the issues are disability-related.
- Accept and defend the right of all people with disabilities to control their own lives.

**Whenever possible, NCCADV will make this brochure available in alternate formats (such as large print, audio, diskette) upon request.**

### **What resources are available to assist domestic violence agencies to better serve survivors with disabilities?**

NC Coalition Against Domestic Violence  
1-888-232-9124  
[www.nccadv.org](http://www.nccadv.org)

NC Office on Disability and Health  
919-843-3882 (Voice)  
919-843-3531 (TTY)  
[nobles@mail.fpg.unc.edu](mailto:nobles@mail.fpg.unc.edu)  
[www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncodh/](http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncodh/)

Insert local program information here:

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## Domestic Violence and People with Disabilities



North Carolina Coalition  
Against Domestic Violence

## Did you know?

- About 85% of women with disabilities have experienced domestic violence. <sup>1</sup>
- Sixty-two percent of a national sample of women with physical disabilities reported having experienced physical, sexual or emotional abuse. <sup>2</sup>
- Adults with developmental disabilities have 4-10 times the risk of physical/sexual assault. <sup>3</sup>

## What is disability?

Disability can be a physical, mental health, cognitive, or sensory condition that limits walking, thinking, seeing, talking, hearing, and/or everyday activities. Some disabilities are present at birth; others come later in life and may result from domestic violence. Some disabilities are visible while others may not be seen.



## How might people with disabilities be vulnerable to domestic violence? <sup>4</sup>

- Persons who are deaf or who have a speech disability may not be able to report abuse or seek services due to communication barriers.
- Individuals with intellectual disabilities often reside in group homes where they are vulnerable to abuse by staff, caregivers or other residents. They are often taught to be obedient and may be overly trusting of others.
- Persons with physical disabilities may depend on others to meet their basic needs such as bathing or toileting, making them vulnerable to abuse. They may also be less able to defend themselves or escape violent situations.
- Persons with disabilities may lack knowledge about their bodies, healthy relationships, and how to protect themselves.
- Persons with disabilities may stay longer in an abusive situation and have fewer options for safety due to barriers at a domestic violence agency or in the community.
- Individuals with disabilities may be perceived by offenders as easy targets.

## What other types of abuse may people with disabilities experience along with the domestic violence? <sup>4</sup>

- Taunting about the disability
- Withholding medication
- Threatening to place the person in a residential facility
- Withholding personal care or assistance (i.e. refusing to prepare meals or bathe the person)
- Withholding needed medical equipment like walkers, canes or wheelchairs
- Rough handling such as causing physical pain during routine care
- Withholding benefits/money or controlling the person's finances
- Withholding access to communication such as sign language interpreters and relay phone services
- Denying right of choice on reproductive issues

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<sup>1</sup> Feuerstein, 1997

<sup>2</sup> Nosek, M. & Howland, C., 1998

<sup>3</sup> Office of Victims of Crime Bulletin, 1998

<sup>4</sup> Disability Services ASAP (A Safety Awareness Program) of SafePlace in Austin, Texas