Recognizing and Reporting Signs of Abuse and Neglect

Abuse and Neglect
A 2013 national survey found that 7 out of 10 people with disabilities reported that they had been abused. Of those, 98% of those victims reported that they knew and trusted their abuser. This fact sheet details signs and symptoms that may be indicative of abuse for a person with a disability. If you see any of these signs, please report them immediately.

Signs of Physical or Sexual Abuse
Physical Indicators

• Unexplained bruises, scratches, marks or burns on the wrists, ankles, or other parts of a body
• Difficulty walking or sitting
• Sexually transmitted infections (STI)
• Ulcers
• Unexplained stomach aches
• Frequent urinary tract infections (UTI)
• Bruising or bleeding in the genital area
• Pain or itching in the genital area
• Torn or bloody underclothing

Behavioral Indicators

• Increased aggression or non-compliance
• Over-willingness to appease
• Change in sleeping patterns
• Attempts to hurt oneself
• Sudden temper control problems
• Change in eating habits
• Violation of other’s property
• Performance/social skills deterioration
• Touch phobia
• Promiscuity or seductive behaviors
• Isolation and/or Depression
Signs of Emotional Abuse

Physical Indicators

- Eating disorders, including obesity and anorexia
- Changes in speech or motor skills (stuttering, stammering, etc.)
- Nervous disorders (rashes, hives, facial tics, stomach aches, etc.)

Behavioral Indicators

- Habit disorders (biting, rocking, headbanging, etc.)
- Cruel behaviors (seeming to get pleasure from hurting others, including animals)
- Behavioral extremes (overly compliant or demanding, withdrawn or aggressive, listless or excitable)

Signs of Neglect

Physical Indicators

- Poor hygiene (lice, scabies, bedsores, body odor, etc.)
- Unsuitable clothing (missing key articles of clothing i.e. underwear, socks, shoes or over/underdressed for climate conditions)
- Untreated injury or illness
- Indicators of prolonged exposure to the elements (excessive sunburn, insect bites, colds, etc.)
- Height and weight significantly below average for age

Behavioral Indicators

- Chronic hunger, tiredness, or lethargy
- Age-inappropriate behaviors (bedwetting, wetting, soiling, etc.)
- Reports of being left alone by caretakers
- Begging for food or leftovers
- Chronic absenteeism from school, work, or day programs

Reporting Abuse

DON’T STAY SILENT! Remember, if you suspect abuse of a child or vulnerable adult, you are legally bound to report it! Below are a few things to keep in mind if you suspect abuse or if someone tells you that they are being abused:

- Do not suggest or imply the story is hard to believe
- Do not assume caregivers should be called
- Believe
• Listen
• Validate the victim’s feelings and affirm the courageous act of reaching out to you
• Empower the victim as they work through the healing process
• Report the abuse

It is important that you report the abuse immediately. Again, don’t stay silent!

The following are several places you can call to report the abuse:

• Adult Protective Services (800) 371-7897
• Utah Child Abuse/Neglect Hotline (855) 323-3237
• Disability Law Center (800) 662-9080
• 24-Hour Statewide Assault Crisis and Information Line (888) 421-1100
• 24-Hour Statewide Domestic Violence LINK Line (800) 897-5465
• Your local police station
The Disability Law Center (DLC) is a private, non-profit organization, designated by the governor as Utah's Protection and Advocacy agency. The DLC believes in a society where abilities, rather than disabilities, are recognized; all people have an equal opportunity to participate; and where all people are treated with equity, dignity, and respect. We work toward our vision by enforcing and advancing the legal rights, choices, and opportunities of Utahns with disabilities. DLC services are available free of charge statewide, regardless of income, legal status, language, or place of residence.

If you have further questions, please contact us. Even though our focus is on cases that can help as many people as possible - because time and resources are limited - we at least offer information and/or referral options to everyone who contacts us. Materials are also available in alternative formats such as audio, large-print, Braille and Spanish. Call (800) 662-9080 or apply for help online, and our staff will contact you within 1-3 business days.