



Connecting on
Disability and Abuse

S'engager contre l'abus
envers les personnes
ayant un handicap

ABUSE OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

► This booklet is for people with disabilities. It explains abuse and violence. It also offers tips on what you can do if you are being abused.



WHAT IS ABUSE?

Abuse is a violent act that causes physical, emotional or financial harm to an individual. Abuse can happen at home, on the street, on public transportation or in institutions (school, police custody, prison, hospitals, etc.).

Abuse is about power and control. People with more power can abuse those with less power. Because of ableism (prejudice against people with disabilities), people with disabilities are vulnerable to abuse.

Forms of abuse include:

PHYSICAL • SEXUAL • PSYCHOLOGICAL
FINANCIAL OR MATERIAL • NEGLECT OR DESERTION • SPIRITUAL

DEFINITIONS

Consent: This is when a person with a disability or anyone else gives permission. People need permission to take money, to enter your home, or to care for you. You also use consent in your personal relationships. If someone wants to touch you in a physical or sexual way, you need to give consent. If you don't, it is considered abuse.

Ableism: This is prejudice against people with disabilities. People with disabilities face discrimination from others in our society.

ARE YOU AT RISK OF BEING ABUSED?

Ask yourself the following questions:

- ▶ Do you have someone in your life who may take advantage of you because you are in a vulnerable situation?
- ▶ Are you isolated from other people (perhaps you don't have proper care or you are not involved in the community)?
- ▶ Do you need to rely on others to provide things like food, shelter and personal care (getting dressed, going to the bathroom or bathing)?
- ▶ Do you know people with negative attitudes towards those with disabilities?

If you answered yes to one or more questions above, you are vulnerable and may be at risk of being abused.

TYPES OF ABUSE AGAINST PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE

Psychological abuse takes place when someone intentionally inflicts any of the following on you:

ANXIETY • HURT • GUILT • FEAR

They may do so through verbal (using their voice or words) or non-verbal acts. This abuse usually makes you feel low and degrades you. It tends to take away your sense of self-worth and self-esteem.

People who abuse you in this way will also reject your opinions and needs in the following ways:

- ▶ They might call you names, insult you, threaten you or yell at you.
- ▶ They may constantly criticize you, intimidate you, force you to do things, or humiliate you.
- ▶ They may use emotional tactics, like socially isolating you, withholding affection, denying you privileges, manipulating you, giving you the silent treatment, or threatening to take your children away.
- ▶ They may deny the abuse ever happened or they will shift responsibility for the abuse on to you. You'll hear statements like, "It's your fault."
- ▶ They often tend to abuse their power or authority, making you feel weak or powerless.

MELISSA'S STORY

Melissa is 31 years old. She suffered a spinal injury when she was 15. She now needs help with meals, bathroom care and getting in and out of bed. She lives in her own apartment. Every day, she must get to work at 8:00 a.m. Personal support workers come to her place to give her the help she needs. Recently, a new worker, Sam, took over her morning routine. Sam soon started acting in a hurried manner and has not listened to Melissa. He told her to shut up. He also ignored Melissa during her bathroom care. One day, Sam threatened to leave Melissa in the shower if Melissa didn't stop complaining. Melissa does not know what to do. She knows that Sam is being abusive, but she does not know who to call.



She is afraid that she will lose her help.

FINANCIAL ABUSE

Financial abuse can take many different forms. It happens when someone you know:

- ▶ Takes and keeps control of your financial resources without your consent. Usually, this makes you financially dependent on the person.
- ▶ Steals money or objects of value from you. Forges your signatures, misuses your money, gets you into debt, or defrauds you.
- ▶ Withholds funds or denies you access to your own money. You may end up begging for your own money for items you need.
- ▶ Gives you an allowance and asks you to justify all the money you have spent.
- ▶ Destroys your property or personal items.

TOM'S STORY

Tom is a 45-year-old man with Multiple Sclerosis (MS). His brother, Jeff, comes to his apartment every Friday to buy Tom's groceries. Tom leaves just enough cash on the kitchen table for his groceries. However, every Friday, Tom notices that he is missing money from his wallet. Tom suspects that his brother is stealing from him, but he does not want to say anything about it.

He is afraid that he will lose his care and it will harm his relationship with his brother.



HOME TAKEOVERS

A home takeover is when a relative, acquaintance or criminal takes over your home. They might start out by selling you drugs, crashing on your couch, or doing illegal activities. Eventually, they move into your house or apartment and you can't get rid of them. People with mental health issues, physical disabilities, developmental disabilities or formerly homeless people are easy targets for those who take over homes.

STEPHANIE'S STORY

Stephanie is 27 years old and living with schizophrenia. She has her own apartment and little support from her family. Recently, she began using crack. The more she used the more forceful her dealer became. Eventually, he was sleeping in her bed and she was on the couch. Soon, many of his friends were also staying in her apartment.

She became scared in her own home and felt like there was no one who could help.



PHYSICAL ABUSE

Physical abuse is when someone causes you physical pain or injures you. It can include any of the following:

- ▶ rough or inappropriate handling
- ▶ grabbing, hitting or punching
- ▶ pulling your hair
- ▶ biting
- ▶ twisting your arm
- ▶ shoving or slapping
- ▶ pinching
- ▶ kicking
- ▶ choking
- ▶ using harmful weapons
- ▶ confining you with restraints
- ▶ restricting your movements
- ▶ over or under-medicating you
- ▶ taking away your aids, such as your cane, guide dog, eyeglasses or wheelchair

SHAWN'S STORY

Shawn is 27 years old and has Cerebral Palsy. He has been dating for many years, but he is now seeing Dave on a regular basis. Dave has been a great boyfriend. Shawn hopes that it will turn into a long-term relationship. Recently, Dave has not been so kind. Dave has pushed Shawn and has refused to help him into his wheelchair. He has even punched Shawn. Dave always apologizes and wants to make up. Shawn does not know what to do.

He really wants a long-term relationship and he believes that Dave is the only one who will love him.



NEGLECT OR DESERTION

Neglect or desertion takes place when your caregiver does not give you what you need to live: enough heat, food, clothing, personal or medical care, or good supervision.

ESTHER'S STORY

Esther is 73 years old. She has dementia. She uses a wheelchair and needs help with meals and personal care. She lives in a nursing home. Her care providers often leave Esther in her room all day without giving her bathroom care.

Esther knows something is wrong, but she does not want to tell her family because she fears that the nursing home will punish her.



SEXUAL ABUSE

Sexual abuse is when someone does any of the following to you:

- ▶ sex act without your consent
- ▶ attempted sex act without your permission
- ▶ abuses you in a sexual way, either through contact or non-contact
- ▶ sexually harasses you either verbally or physically
- ▶ touches or fondles your genitals (private parts)
- ▶ sexually assaults or rapes you

SARAH'S STORY

Sarah is 21 years old. She has Down's syndrome. She lives at home with her parents and attends classes at the local university. Three evenings a week, a student from the university comes to her house to help her with her school work. Shane comes to help on Wednesdays. He often says sexual things to Sarah and touches her in inappropriate ways. One evening, he forced her to have sex.



Sarah does not want to tell her parents because she fears that they won't believe her and that she will get kicked out of school.

SPIRITUAL ABUSE

Spiritual abuse takes place when someone:

- ▶ Prevents you from practicing your faith or religion.
- ▶ Makes fun of, or ridicules, your beliefs.
- ▶ Handles your spiritual belongings in a disrespectful way.

ANDY'S STORY

Andy is a 25 year old man. He has Muscular Dystrophy. Andy lives with his father and relies on him for assistance. Although Andy grew up in a Christian family, he decided that Christianity is not for him. Andy's good friend helped him convert to Islam. Andy's father did not like this change. He has refused to let Andy's friend into the house. He does not allow Andy the time to pray and has threatened to kick him out of the house.

Andy is afraid to tell anyone about what has happened because he fears losing his father's help.



WHAT TO DO IF ANY OF THESE FORMS OF ABUSE HAPPENS TO YOU

- ▶ Take your time to understand what is happening.
- ▶ When you are ready, talk about your experiences with someone you trust.
- ▶ Join community organizations that want to end the abuse of people with disabilities.
- ▶ Contact the resources listed on the next page.

WHAT IF SOMEONE YOU KNOW IS BEING ABUSED?

If someone you know is being abused, they may want your help and support. It is important to listen to them.

- ▶ Let them tell you their story. Believe it. All too often, people who are abused are dismissed and not believed.
- ▶ Offer resources if you can.
- ▶ Let them know that the abuse is not their fault.
- ▶ Make sure they understand that no one deserves to be abused.
- ▶ Suggest that they speak to someone else, such as a professional (police, counsellor, social services, trusted friend), about their experience.

HOW TO SAY NO TO ABUSE AND VIOLENCE

No one should ever experience abuse. Remember, you are not alone. Here are steps you can take to stay safe:

- ▶ Become an active community member and speak out against the abuse of people with disabilities.
- ▶ Let people know that you have the right to be treated with dignity, to be respected and to be heard.
- ▶ Go to community events to learn about important issues, such as the abuse of people with disabilities.
- ▶ Let your caregivers know that you have a right to be treated fairly and that you deserve proper care at all times.
- ▶ Speak with friends, family, co-workers and the public about the abuse of people with disabilities.

WHERE TO GET HELP

The following Ottawa resources can offer you someone to talk with, to advocate for you or to provide immediate assistance:

Emergencies (if you are in immediate danger or you need an ambulance): 911

City services, including housing: 311

Community information and resources: 211

Youth Services Bureau 24/7 Crisis Line: 613-260-2360

This crisis line for children and youth ages 18 and under who are experiencing a crisis, and for parents, guardians, caregivers, friends or service providers who are concerned about a young person in crisis.

Website: www.ysb.on.ca

Email: crisis@ysb.on.ca

Ottawa Victim Services: 613-238-2762

This organization offers support and services for people who have been a victim of crime or abuse.

Website: www.ovs-svo.com

Email: vcars@ovs-svo.com

Assaulted Women's Help Line: 1-866-863-0511

This service offers support for women who are stuck in abusive situations.

Website: www.awhl.org

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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ABOUT CODA: CONNECTING ON DISABILITY AND ABUSE

At CODA, our goal is to address the abuse of people with disabilities. We are a community-based initiative that brings together people and organizations from all over Ottawa. CODA creates change by offering an open forum for discussion and dialogue on the issue of abuse of people with disabilities.

Website: www.crimepreventionottawa.ca/en/initiatives/Connecting-on-Disability-and-Abuse-

Email: CPO@ottawa.ca

Phone: 613-580-2424, ext. 22454



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