



WCSAP
Washington Coalition of
Sexual Assault Programs

THE
ADVOCACY STATION

Providing Accessible, Safe and Dignified Sexual Assault Services to Survivors with Intellectual/ Developmental Disabilities (I/DD)

Disability is a broad term used to describe any mental, sensory, cognitive, emotional and/or physical characteristic that may limit a person's physical or emotional well-being, or ability.

Disability is a complex set of ideas and experiences that reflect the interactions between features of a person's mind or body and features of the society in which one lives. People may or may not identify with disability.

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) are sexually assaulted at a rate seven times higher than those without disabilities. People with I/DD are at heightened risk because they are in more frequent contact with caregivers and family members. Sometimes these people exploit their positions of trust to exert power and sexually abuse the people who they are meant to support. Additionally, people with I/DD are taught to be compliant and "to cooperate." Finally, when people with I/DD do report abuse they are less likely to be believed.

Sexual Assault Advocates and Therapists can decrease barriers to sexual assault services for people with I/DD through intentional changes.

Communication and Supported Decision Making are two important areas covered here. There is always more to learn about working with disability communities. Please follow up with further self and group study to make your agency a safer place for all survivors!

Communicating with survivors with I/DD

- Assume competence
- Mutual respect
- Provide a safe, accessible environment
 - Find out what “safe” means for this individual.
 - Ask: What are their accessibility needs?
- All people communicate, even if they don’t speak
 - If a person has difficulty verbalizing or articulating how they feel, consider a referral for an assessment to determine if there is any assistive technology that the individual would like to try. Contact Disability Rights Washington at (800) 562-2702 or (206) 324-1521 and 711 for TTY
 - See links to further resources for information about assistive technology
- Use plain, accurate language: (avoid metaphorical, vague, or condescending language)
- Provide clear instructions with smaller steps
- Give time for people to respond at their pace and process time
- Practice Supported Decision-Making

Supported Decision-Making

Supported Decision-Making is a process in which an individual's autonomy, dignity, and choice are respected in making decisions. The supported decision-making practice ensures a survivor is able to exercise rights, choices and preferences. Supports are put in place so that decisions are not made without an individual's input, buy-in, or due consideration of the individual's expressed wishes. Decisions are made through a supportive and informed process, to the greatest extent possible, by an individual with a disability.

Supported decision making can look different for everyone, some examples may include:

- developing and providing plain language materials or information in visual or audio form
- extra time to discuss choices
- creating lists of pros and cons
- role-playing activities to help the person understand choices

→ Need more guidance on Supported Decision-Making? Disability Rights Maine has developed a wonderful guide that can be downloaded for free here: <http://supportmydecision.org/assets/tools/DRM-SDM-Handbook-Rev.-7.19.19.pdf> and the National Center for Supported Decision Making has a wealth of information to share including how this interacts with guardianship.

References

"Alliance to End Sexual Violence in Long Term Care: Project Values and Assumptions." Disability Rights Washington, 1 Sept. 2013, www.disabilityrightswa.org/publications/alliance-to-end-sexual-violence-in-long-term-care-project-values-and-assumptions/print/.

Shapiro, Joseph. "The Sexual Assault Epidemic No One Talks About." NPR, National Public Radio, 8 Jan. 2018, 5:00am, www.npr.org/2018/01/08/570224090/the-sexual-assault-epidemic-no-one-talks-about

Nancy Thaler, a deputy secretary of Pennsylvania's Department of Human Services; Ibid

"Alliance to End Sexual Violence in Long Term Care: Project Values and Assumptions." Disability Rights Washington, 1 Sept. 2013, 6:00am, www.disabilityrightswa.org/publications/alliance-to-end-sexual-violence-in-long-term-care-project-values-and-assumptions/print/.

Reading, Resources & Tools

- **NPR's special series by Joseph Shapiro titled "Abused and Betrayed,"** on the epidemic of sexual assault against people with I/DD. Series and transcripts here: <https://www.npr.org/series/575502633/abused-and-betrayed>
- **The Alliance to End Sexual Violence in Long-term Care Facilities Podcast** and accompanying slideshow: features long-term care residents talking about their sexual violence experiences and targeted oppression against people with disabilities, Black/Indigenous/People of Color, seniors,

youth, and lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender/queer+ communities. (Content warning). <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1dJgMcdiN13bmEI9LvwrO4IrJK57eBGWw/view>

- **Disability Rights Washington**, protects the rights of and provides free services to people with disabilities statewide. <https://www.disabilityrightswa.org/>
- **The National Council on Independent Living, Sex Ed for People with I/DD**: video series: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLuEvYNNQ-dHeVhbyeJHx9s8oqsvBk621v> and Discussion Guide: <https://ncil.org/sex-ed-for-individuals-with-i-dd/>
- **The Washington Assistive Technology Act Program (WATAP)** provides resources and services to persons who face challenges related to disability and aging to help in the selection and use of assistive technology (AT) to help make tasks easier or possible in school, at work, at home, and in the community. WATAP serves seniors and persons with disabilities, and their circle of support, including family members, caregivers, employers, service provider professionals, educators, and others seeking AT expertise. <http://watap.org/>
- **Sins Invalid, 10 Principles of Disability Justice**: <https://www.sinsinvalid.org/blog/10-principles-of-disability-justice>