

A woman with dark hair, wearing a white tank top, a grey cardigan, and white pants, is standing and holding a silver cane with blue handgrips. She has blue braces on her forearms. The background is a mix of purple, white, and light blue geometric shapes.

A Handbook on *Violence Against Women with Disabilities*

Developed by:

New Jersey Department of Human Services,
Division of Disability Services
in partnership with

The New Jersey Coalition to End Domestic Violence
and

The New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault

Produced by NJDHS

The
Unheard Voice

The logo for 'The Unheard Voice' features the text 'The Unheard Voice' in a stylized, orange, cursive font. To the right of the text is a small, yellow and black butterfly icon.

Women with disabilities are 3 to 10 times more likely than women without disabilities to experience abuse and violence. Additionally, women with disabilities experience multiple types of abuse for longer periods of time.

Women with some types of disabilities, including developmental, cognitive, vision and hearing disabilities; older women; women of color with disabilities; and women who depend on personal care assistance have an increased risk for abuse.

An abuser can be anyone: a family member, friend, stranger, or a professional caregiver. An abuser can be of any race, educational level, cultural background, socioeconomic level, or sexual orientation.

What is Abuse?

Abuse is an effort by one person to exert control over another. Having a disability may make a woman less able to resist the efforts of another person to control her, or force her to do something against her will.

There are many types of abuse:

- Physical (hitting, slapping, beating)
- Verbal (criticizing, belittling, blaming, shouting)



- Emotional (isolating her from others, demeaning or ridiculing)
- Sexual (forcing a woman to have sex against her will, rape, exploiting her sexually, inappropriate touching)
- Denying personal needs, or personal care (keeping her from getting food or water, bathing, using the toilet, or caring for herself)
- Preventing contact or communication with others
- Financial exploitation, theft, forgery, or using Power of Attorney against her will
- Removing/destroying assistive devices
- Controlling personal reproductive decisions
- Forging her name to documents without her knowledge or against her will

Why Do Women with Disabilities Stay in Abusive Situations?

- ❖ Not knowing how and where to get help
- ❖ Fear of harm or loss of personal resources
- ❖ Reliance on others for transportation, care, health insurance, or housing
- ❖ They may fear the loss of custody of their children
- ❖ They may fear deportation or arrest due to immigration status

- ❖ They may fear rejection by family, community, cultural or religious group
- ❖ Lack of resources

What Does Abuse Do To Women With Disabilities?

- Causes fear, emotional distress and isolation
- Puts women and their children at risk of harm
- Puts women at risk of financial loss, loss of child custody, or child support
- Imposes risk of physical injury, harm, or even death

What Can Women with Disabilities Do To Help Themselves?

- Learn about disability, domestic violence and sexual assault local resources and services
- Ask others about help to leave the abusive situation or environment
- Contact women's shelters, talk with other women and work with religious communities
- Join a support group for abused women
- Offer support to other women who are being abused
- Learn more about abuse and how to identify it



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Not Sure if You're Being Abused?

If you answer "yes" to any of these questions, you are experiencing abuse!

Within the last year...

1. Have you been intentionally hit, slapped, kicked, pushed, or physically hurt by someone?
2. Have you been forced to have sexual activities?
3. Have you been prevented from using an assistive device such as a wheelchair, cane or respirator?

4. Has anyone you depend on refused to help you with an important personal need, such as taking your medicine, getting to the bathroom, getting out of bed, bathing, getting dressed, or getting food or drink?
5. Have you been threatened, intimidated, coerced, or manipulated to do things that made you fearful or do things that you did not wish to do?
6. Have you been humiliated, shamed, called names, overly criticized, or otherwise belittled?

Know Your Rights

You have the right to:

- Live an independent, active and full life
- Live without violence or abuse
- Have safe and healthy relationships with people of your choice
- Your own sexual identity, sexual orientation and gender identification
- Access quality physical and mental health care
- Access transportation resources
- Privacy



- Your own sexual identity, sexual orientation and gender identification
- Develop and relate to others as sexual beings
- Access birth control
- Marry, and decide whom to marry
- Have children or not
- Legal representation and full protection of your legal rights
- Make or participate in decisions that affect your life, determine your own future and make personal life choices
- Access community services
- Determine who signs all documents that relate to you, including financial documents
- Say “No” to anything that makes you feel uncomfortable

Relationship Rights

In healthy relationships, you have the right to:

- ◆ Be respected
- ◆ Be treated and spoken to like an adult
- ◆ Be treated in a caring way
- ◆ Be treated as a valuable person
- ◆ Have a personal assistant or caregiver who doesn't hurt your feelings or your body

Safety Planning

Making a Plan to Get out of an Abusive Situation

It is very important for women living in abusive environments to think about safety and prepare in advance to avoid any potential danger. Safety is your highest priority. This safety planning checklist will help in planning an escape from abusive situations:



- ◆ Identify someone you trust to help you develop a plan to leave an abusive relationship.
- ◆ Utilize friends, the emergency department, shelter, police, or a church, synagogue, temple, mosque, or mission to help support your plan.
- ◆ Do not let your abuser know of your plan. Be careful not to leave clues regarding your destination, such as phone bills, texts, emails, web search histories or information from an organization where you plan to go.
- ◆ If the abuser is the payee on your SSI/SSDI benefits - change it to someone you trust.

You, or a caseworker from a domestic violence shelter, disability service agency or Adult Protective Services, will need to contact the Social Security Administration to change the payee name: 1-800-772-1213, or ssa.gov.

- ◆ Open a checking account in your name only. Have your benefit checks direct deposited into that account. If you have joint accounts with the abuser, try to move some of your money into your own account. If possible, bank statements should be online.
- ◆ Plan for assistance with personal care tasks. Ask friends, family members or trusted people in your faith community to help provide your care.
- ◆ If you receive Medicaid/Medicare and are low income, you may locate personal care assistance through the NJ Department of Human Services' Division of Disability Services, call 1-888-285-3036.
- ◆ Get a post office box in your name, hide the key, or give it to a trusted friend or relative.
- ◆ Ask friends, family, members of your house of worship if they may be willing to let you stay with them or help you financially to transition out of an abusive situation.
- ◆ If you drive an adapted vehicle, make sure that the adaptations are in good repair and the vehicle is in working order. If you

suspect the abuser has tampered with your vehicle, have it checked. Always have gas in your vehicle in case you must leave in a hurry.

- ◆ If you live in a major metropolitan area, consider applying for special or paratransit services. A healthcare provider or caseworker can certify your disability if they have provided services to you.
- ◆ Call the local women's shelter in your area, or the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233). Ask them for help to strategize with safety planning. Let them know what your needs are and that you have a disability. Inquire about accessibility at the shelter and if the shelter is full, ask to be put on the waiting list and check back daily.
- ◆ Stay in touch with your local crisis hotline. Memorize or keep the crisis hotline number with you.
- ◆ Call and talk with other disability related service providers and disability rights organizations listed in this guide.

Support groups, County Offices on Disabilities and Independent Living Centers can offer assistance to locate accessible support services.



- ◆ Call Adult Protective Services (APS) at 1-800-792-8820 and report the abuse and your situation. APS will send a social worker to investigate and if your request one, a police officer. APS will conduct interviews, file a report and determine how to assist you. If you decide to press charges against your abuser and you fear retaliation, a report is made with your police department, so they are aware of the abusive situation. APS will assist in relocating you to a shelter, with family or friends, or set up other temporary emergency services.
- ◆ When you leave, write a note to the abuser that says you went to an appointment or location that will not make the abuser suspicious to give you a head start.
- ◆ If you use a credit card after leaving, make sure that the bill will not be sent to a place the abuser has access.
- ◆ Get a civil protection order to inform the abuser he or she must stay away from you and your children.
- ◆ You may need emergency legal services to protect your children. You can request supervised visits so the visits will be watched by a trusted person in a safe place.



- ◆ If using the Internet for resources, delete your history so it will not be seen.
- ◆ If possible, keep on your person an extra car key, money or credit card, cell phone, driver's license, disability identification, social security cards, and medical ID cards.

What to take With You When You Leave - A Checklist:

If you can, pack these items in advance and leave them with a trusted friend or relative:

✓ *Identification*

- Driver's license or state I.D. card
- Your birth certificate, children's certificates or other family member's
- Social Security Card
- Proof of disability (Social Security award letter, doctor's note, disability identification card from DMV or state agency)
- EBT card (food stamps)
- Insurance, Medicaid, Medicare and clinic card
- Money, credit cards and ATM card
- Bank books, account information and checkbooks
- Information on investments, individual retirement account, mortgage and car loan

✓ *Legal Papers*

- Lease or house payment information/ deed to the house
- Car registration and car insurance documents
- Health and life insurance documents
- Living Will and Advance Directive
- Children's school records and vaccinations records
- Work permits (green card, VISA)
- Passport
- Cellular phone programmed with trusted contact numbers
- Divorce papers/documents
- Child custody papers
- Protective or restraining order



✓ *Other Important Disability-Related Items*

- Adaptive equipment (wheelchair, shower bench, crutches, communicative devices, etc.)
- Medications, prescriptions and doctor's orders
- Urological supplies
- Service animal and supplies for their care
- Names and phone numbers of home health agencies, caseworkers and disability service providers to assist in coordinating services for you

- Phone numbers of friends or past attendants who might be willing to help with personal care tasks during the transition period and provide some emotional support
- Fixed route bus pass, Mobility ID card or Special Transit ID card
- Medical records and doctor's phone numbers

✓ **Personal Items**

- Keys to the house, car and office
- Jewelry and personal care products
- Address book and tablet
- Pictures of you, your children, grandchildren, the abuser and evidence of physical abuse
- Children's favorite toys, clothes, diapers and child care items

Getting Help Immediately

What to do in an emergency:

- ❖ Call 9-1-1. No special number is needed for TTY.
- ❖ If you can't get to the phone, yell or make noise. Someone may hear you and call 9-1-1.
- ❖ When the police arrive, show them any bruises or other injuries you may have, and anything the abuser has broken or damaged.
- ❖ Ask the police to write a police report.

- ❖ Talk to the police in a place away from the abuser.
- ❖ Call a local domestic violence/sexual assault organization in your area. They will tell you where to get help with legal issues and how to stay safe.
- ❖ Call 609-584-8107 for the NJ Coalition to End Domestic Violence: njcedv.org/.
- ❖ Call 609-631-4450 for the NJ Coalition Against Sexual Assault: njcasa.org/.
- ❖ Call someone you know to inform the person of your situation and stay in touch.

Hide or escape?

Escape

- ▲ Escape to a safe place such as domestic violence shelter, which has a secret location
- ▲ Stay with friends or family, but consider if the location may be known to the abuser



Hide

- Determine which rooms in your home are the safest
- Teach your children a safe place to run if they feel unsafe
- Avoid being trapped in a room without a way to escape

Breaking the Cycle of Abuse

You have the power to break the cycle of abuse. Abuse is not your fault.



- ❑ Contact a support group in your area. Call the Self-Help Clearing House at 1-800-367-6274 or at www.njgroups.org to find a group in your area.
- ❑ Call the NJ Division on Women hotline: 609-888-7164
- ❑ Contact the following organizations for information on counseling or support:
 - Independent Living Centers
 - Disability Service Organizations
 - Domestic Violence organizations such as NJCEDV
 - Sexual Assault Organizations such as NJCASA
 - County Offices for the Disabled

Resources

VAWA State Resources

Domestic Violence Hotline

800-572-SAFE (7233)

NJ Coalition Against Sexual Assault Hotline

800-601-7200

NJ Coalition Against Sexual Assault

njcasa.org

609-631-4450

NJ Coalition to End Domestic Violence

njcedv.org

609-584-8107

NJ Office of Victim Witness Advocacy

njvw.org

609-376-2444 or 609-376-2438

NJ Adult Protective Services

nj.gov/humanservices/doas/services/aps/

800-792-8820

Office on Prevention of Violence Against Women

nj.gov/dcf/women/opvaw/

609-888-7164

NJ Division of Developmental Disabilities

nj.gov/humanservices/ddd/home/about/

800-832-9173

NJ Division of Deaf and Hard of Hearing

nj.gov/humanservices/ddhh/home/

800-792-8339

Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired

nj.gov/humanservices/cbvi/home/index.html

877-685-8878

NJ Department of Children and Families

nj.gov/dcf

855-INFO-DCF (855-463-6323)

NJ Association of County Disability Services

lwd.dol.state.nj.us/labor/roles/disable/ACDS.html

609-659-9045

Centers for Independent Living

(See NJ Statewide Independent Living Council)

njsilc.org

Deaf Advocacy Project

deafadvocacyproject.org/

800-573-7233 hotline

Disability Rights NJ

drnj.org

800-922-7233

Woman Space

womanspace.org

609-394-0136

VAWA Federal Resources

**Office on Violence Against Women –
Justice Department**

<https://www.justice.gov/ovw/about-office>

WomensHealth.gov

<https://www.womenshealth.gov/relationships-and-safety>

<https://www.womenshealth.gov/relationships-and-safety/other-types/violence-against-women-disabilities>

The Center for Changing Our Campus Culture (college)

<http://changingourcampus.org/>

Dating, Violence Sexual Assault and Stalking Resources, Hotlines and more:

<https://www.justice.gov/ovw/areas-focus>

Sexual Assault Response Team toolkit

<https://ovc.ncjrs.gov/sartkit/index.html>

References

Stop the Violence, Break the Silence - A Training Guide (2003) C.M. Hughes, MPA, Edited by W.H. Abramson, LMSW, SafePlace, Austin, TX

Handbook for Shelters Serving Deaf Women and Their Children, 2nd Edition, Abused Deaf Women's Advocacy Services, Seattle, WA

Intimate & Caregiver Violence Against Women with Disabilities (July, 2000)-Patricia Erwin, MA, University of California

The New Jersey Department of Human Services (NJ DHS) complies with applicable Federal civil rights laws and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, or sex. NJ DHS does not exclude people or treat them differently because of race, color, national origin, age, disability, or sex. The NJ DHS:

- Provides free aids and services to people with disabilities to communicate effectively with us, such as: Qualified sign language interpreters
- Written information in other formats (large print, audio, accessible electronic formats, other formats)
- Provides free language services to people whose primary language is not English, such as: Qualified interpreters
- Information written in other languages

If you need these services, contact the NJ Civil Rights Coordinator, or if you believe that the NJ DHS has failed to provide these services or discriminated in another way on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, or sex, you can file a grievance with the NJ Civil Rights Coordinator, NJ Department of Human Services, Office of Legal and Regulatory Affairs, P.O. Box 700, Trenton, NJ 08625-0700 phone: 609-777-2026, e-mail: DHS-CO.OLRA@dhs.state.nj.us.

You can also file a civil rights complaint with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office for Civil Rights, electronically through the Office for Civil Rights Complaint Portal, available at <https://ocrportal.hhs.gov/ocr/portal/lobby.jsf>, or by mail or phone at: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 200 Independence Avenue, SW Room 509F, HHH Building Washington, D.C. 20201 1-800-368-1019, 800-537-7697 (TDD) Complaint forms are available at <http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/office/file/index.html>.