

Arc Guide About Victimization and Abuse

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) have the highest rate of abuse compared to people with other disabilities. They are 3 times more likely to experience violent crime. Violent crime includes rape, assault, and robbery. The estimated rate of sexual assault against people with IDD is 7 times higher than people without disabilities. 65% of violence is by someone they know. This is often family members and caregivers. ¹

Adults with IDD often have relationships with an imbalance of power and control. This imbalance, combined with barriers to access knowledge and experiences, creates:

- Learned helplessness
- Learned compliance
- A desire to please others
- No sense of personal boundaries

These learned behaviors could increase risk of harm in all areas of their lives. This includes where they live, learn, work, play, and worship.

People with IDD often share common factors that increase risk **for harm**:

- They often experience relationships where there is an imbalance of power and control.
- They are less likely or able to report.
- When a report is made, they may not be believed.
- They are targeted for the victimization and abuse due to having a disability.
- They often think actions by others are normal and do not realize they have been victimized.
- They are rarely educated about sexuality, healthy relationships, or provided with assertiveness training.
- They are often isolated with very few ways to get help, get to a safe place, or access victim services or counseling.

People with IDD often share common factors that increase risk **to harm others**:

- They often lack information and understanding about sexual expression and intimacy.

- They have limited education and understanding about safe, healthy relationships and sexual behavior.
- They may have difficulty expressing emotions.
- They may have limited partner relationships.
- They may have experienced sexual or physical abuse.
- They may have exposure to violence or pornography.

People with IDD face many challenges and safety risks when navigating abuse. These are present whether they decide to stay, leave, or return to an abusive relationship. Fear is one of the most powerful reasons for staying. People may stay even when they experience abuse, neglect, sexual, or domestic violence.

Power and Control Dynamics

There are unique power and control dynamics experienced by persons with IDD. Abusers may target people with IDD because they see them as easy targets. Abusers use power and control tactics such as:

- Becoming the primary caregiver before the abuse and then using their power to:
 - Take advantage of persons with IDD who have been taught to obey authority
 - Provide care that stresses the person's dependency and takes advantage of them
 - Deny the right to privacy
- Exploiting the desire to please others
- Taking advantage of people with IDD who have been denied access to sex education. This denial results in a lack of knowledge about sex and healthy relationships
- Breaking or stealing adaptive equipment
- Limiting access to or breaking equipment for communication, such as phones
- Preventing reporting through threats or force
- Telling the person with IDD they won't be believed
- Withholding access to food, healthcare, money, and transportation

Additional Factors

- Society questions credibility when persons with disabilities report victimization and abuse
- Society views persons with disabilities as non-sexual
- Victims may not know how or where to report abuse
- Community services may not have knowledge and training to support persons with IDD. This includes sexual violence centers, victim services, and law enforcement
- Disability service providers may not question the caregiver's actions
- Fear of retaliation by disability service provider if they were to report

Sources

¹Bureau of Justice Statistics, [Crime Against Persons with Disabilities, 2009-2015 Statistical Tables](#), (U.S. Department of Justice, 2017)

Resources

[Crime Victims Bill of Rights](#) for Minnesota

[RapeHelpMN.org](#)

- Find a sexual assault program near you and connect with an advocate. Most programs have a 24-hour hotline.

[Minnesota Day One Crisis Line](#)

- Emergency housing or shelter
- Call 1-866-223-1111 or text 612-399-9995

[National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#)

- Call 1-800-273-8255
- Free and confidential support.
- Prevention and crisis resources, and best practices for professionals.

[Minnesota Adult Abuse Reporting Center \(MAARC\)](#)

- Call 1-844-880-1574
- Report suspected maltreatment of a vulnerable adult.
- If this is an emergency, call 911 first.

MN Office of the Ombudsman for Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities (OMHDD)

- For concerns or complaints about the actions of an agency, facility, or program. This could be a person-specific or a system-wide concern.
- Call 1-800-657-3506.

For more information or advocacy services, contact The Arc Minnesota at 833.450.1494 or visit www.arcminnesota.org. (Please note: *This document is not legal advice. No information should replace the advice of an attorney.*)

All rights reserved (c) 2020 The Arc Minnesota. Document updated June 2020.