



EASY READ

**AUTISM & SAFETY TOOLKIT:
SAFETY TIPS FOR SELF ADVOCATES
ON ABUSE AND NEGLECT**



Autism and Safety Toolkit: Safety Tips for Self Advocates on Abuse and Neglect



Abuse and neglect are big problems in our community. Some people with developmental disabilities are more at risk for a few reasons:

- They might not know what abuse and neglect are because they didn't learn about it.
- Some people can't talk easily, so they can't tell anyone about it.
- Talking about abuse and neglect can be hard, and nobody teaches them how to do it.
- They might be scared of losing help if they tell about the abuse.
- Some are told to do what others say without asking questions, so they let abuse keep happening.
- Some think they deserve to be treated badly, even though nobody does.
- Bad experiences with the police or authorities can stop them from reporting abuse.
- They might worry that people won't believe them if they talk about the abuse.

Abuse and Neglect at Home or Between People

How can I tell if I am being abused and/or neglected?



Pay attention to your feelings when around someone. Your feelings matter the most! Signs of abuse may include:

- Someone hurting you or touching you when you do not want them to
- Using mean words or insults
- Keeping you away from friends and family
- Forcing you to do things you do not want to do.
- Not giving you things you need unless you do what they say
- Making you be with people when you do not want to
- Not taking care of your needs
- Refusing to help with daily tasks

These actions show that you are being abused. Other things not listed here can also be abuse. Remember, family members don't have the right to hurt you because of your relationship. You have the right to your own body.

What Should I Do If I Am Being Abused or Neglected?

If you can, be around friends or family who can help. Talk to a therapist, school staff, or service providers. Be aware that they may be mandated reporters who are required to report abuse to the authorities.



If you need to leave an abusive situation:

- Pack important items like ID, money, food, clothes, and medicine
- Make sure you can reach your important stuff easily
- Plan a safe place to go
- Get legal protection like restraining orders
- Think about reporting to the police
- Plan where you will live in the long term and tell Social Security your new address

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What If I Have No Friends or Nowhere to Go? Who Can I Report Abuse and Neglect to?

In cases where you lack a support network:

- Contact organizations like www.loveisrespect.org for help.
- Seek refuge in domestic violence shelters. Ensure accessibility.
- Call 911 if in immediate danger.
- Talk to caseworkers, doctors, or counselors.
- Contact Protection and Advocacy Organizations or P&As also called Disability Rights, or Adult Protective Services (APS).

LGBTQ people also have rights. Shelters must follow non-discrimination laws.



If You Depend on Your Abuser for Help

What if the Person Abusing You is Also Your Caregiver or Service Provider?

Medicaid Can Help

Medicaid is a program that can assist you. In most states, Medicaid offers something called "home- and community-based services (HCBS) waivers." These waivers allow you to receive the help you need in your community.



Choosing a New Caregiver

If you already get HCBS services through Medicaid, you have the right to choose who helps you. You can pick someone you trust and leave the abusive person behind.

Applying for HCBS Services

If you are not currently receiving HCBS services from Medicaid, you may be eligible. You can apply for a Medicaid-funded HCBS waiver.

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Prioritizing Abuse Survivors

Some states give priority to people who have been abused or neglected. This means you might get help faster.

What if my abuser is my guardian?

If your guardian is hurting you, you can still contact 911, P&A organizations, or APS for help. P&A's are experts in helping people under guardianship.

For more information on Protection and Advocacy organizations go to www.ndrn.org and search for your state office.

You can also find information on alternatives to guardianship by visiting the National Resource Center on Supported Decision-Making at <https://supporteddecisionmaking.org/>

How can I tell if someone I know is being abused and/or neglected?

Look for signs of abuse or neglect in someone's life:

- Observe changes in their behavior or mood
- Notice differences in appearance or hygiene
- Check if someone controls their actions or isolates them
- Pay attention to physical injuries or unexplained marks
- Assess changes in their life circumstances

Approach them privately and express your concern. Listen and support them in finding accessible resources, crisis hotlines, or professionals who can help.



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Signs Someone You Know Might Be in Trouble

Before talking to someone you're concerned about, it's helpful to look for signs that they might be facing problems.



Here are some ways to do that:

Check How They Feel

- Are they often feeling uncomfortable or sad?
- Do they seem angry all the time or have a quick temper now?
- Are they unusually fearful of bad things happening?
- Do they appear much more nervous than before?
- Have you heard them saying things like "Stop," "Don't hurt me," or "No, please," even when there's no apparent threat?

All of these signs could be signs of abuse and neglect. They might also be scared by things that were not scary before, like certain scents or voices. This could be a sign they have been hurt before.

Notice Changes in Their Behavior

- If they used to dress well, do they now look messy or wear dirty clothes often?
- Were they once enthusiastic about activities they enjoyed, like games or sports, but now seem disinterested?
- When you ask them why they have stopped doing things they used to enjoy, do they say they are "not allowed" anymore?
- Are they struggling with tasks they used to handle easily?
- Do they have unusual marks, cuts, scrapes, bruises, or injuries, with no explanation?

Look for Changes in Their Life

- Is there someone in their life who is always angry at them, and does this person scare them?
- Have you noticed that you rarely see them anymore, even though you used to spend time together?
- Are they skipping social events, parties, church, school, or work more frequently?
- Do they seem to have financial problems now, even though they had money before?
- Have they developed new, odd habits, like constantly checking the time?

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If you see many of these signs happening at the same time, there is a possibility that something is not right. Consider setting up a time to talk with them to find out what is going on.

What should I do during the talk?

Speak privately and respectfully, using their communication method. Be patient and offer support without making decisions for them. Let them know their safety is a priority.



What if the person does not want my help?

If they do not want help right away, remind them that abuse isn't love. Suggest they talk to a friend, professional, or abuse hotline.

What if I cannot talk to the person about what is happening?

If you cannot ask them, talk to their friends or classmates. In an emergency, call Adult Protective Services, but be cautious as they may involve the police.

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This can be risky, especially during a mental health crisis because the police are not always trained to handle such situations.

You can also contact the Protection and Advocacy organization, especially if the person is under guardianship or in a group home.



Protection and Advocacy groups are less likely to push for guardianship. For more information on Protection and Advocacy organizations go to www.ndrn.org and search for your state office.