

YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

How does disability interact with domestic and family violence and how may domestic and family violence present differently for young people with disability?

THIS FACT SHEET CAN HELP IF...

1. You would like to learn some of the basic ways that disability and domestic violence can interact
2. You would like to be given some examples of ways that domestic violence can occur and how abuse can take different forms for people with disability
3. You are interested in better understanding why young people with disability experience abuse at higher rates

THIS FACT SHEET IS HELPFUL FOR...

Anybody who wants to learn more about young people with disability and family and domestic violence



WHAT IS FAMILY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

Family and domestic violence is a crime. The term **domestic violence** is usually used to describe abuse that occurs between two intimate partners. Domestic violence includes many different forms of abuse, such as emotional and financial abuse and is not limited to physical violence. Examples of these forms of abuse are given in the next section.

The term **family violence** is used more broadly to describe abuse that happens in the home between

family members. This can include abuse between parents and children, abuse between siblings or abuse between you and anybody you live with.

For people with disability and especially those who live in assisted living facilities or have a support worker who spends a lot of time in their home, when we talk about family and domestic violence situations, we are also including abuse that may occur within those relationships.

WAYS THAT DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE CAN OCCUR: Including non-traditional forms specific to people with disability

PHYSICAL

- Hitting, slapping, punching, choking, kicking, pushing, burning or overpowering.
- Giving somebody medicine to make them sleepy or *easier to deal with*.
- Not giving somebody medicine that they need, or not adhering to a required medication schedule.
- Damaging or confiscating mobility aids or equipment/technology. For example, a wheelchair, hearing aids or a cane.
- Refusing to help somebody with essential daily tasks such as eating, going to the toilet or showering.



EMOTIONAL

- Threatening somebody, their family members, friends, pets or assistance animals.
- Threatening to send somebody away or have them institutionalised if they *misbehave*.
- Calling somebody names or insulting or humiliating them in other ways.
- Telling somebody that they cannot reveal abuse or neglect to the authorities because no one will believe them due to their disability.
- Accusing somebody of *faking* their disability or making it seem worse than it is.



WAYS THAT DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE CAN OCCUR: Including non-traditional forms specific to people with disability



FINANCIAL

- Not allowing somebody to choose how they spend their money.
- Controlling somebody's money and not giving them access to their own bank accounts.
- Not paying somebody's bills correctly for them. With bills including things like rent, utilities, groceries, medicine and medical expenses.
- Having somebody sign financial contracts that they do not understand.
- Taking advantage of somebody's generosity or tricking them into giving away money.

SEXUAL

- Forcing somebody to have sex or do sexual things that they don't want to do.
- Refusing to help somebody with things that they need help with until they engage in unwanted sexual activity.
- Taking inappropriate photos of somebody without their permission.
- Forcing somebody to be sterilised or to have an unwanted abortion.
- Forcing somebody to become pregnant and have a child if this is not what they want.





SOCIAL

- Not letting somebody see or speak to their friends, family or support services.
- Leaving somebody at home to avoid helping them with getting ready to go out.
- Stopping somebody from engaging with communities that they are a part of. For example, not letting them practise their religion or not allowing them to explore or be open about their sexuality or gender identity.




UNDERSTANDING VIOLENCE AGAINST PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY: Why do young people with disability experience higher rates of abuse?



We often hear that young people and people with disability are more vulnerable to family and domestic abuse and understanding why this is can help to identify risky environments and relationships.

Some of the main reasons that young people with disability can be at greater risk of experiencing abuse are:

- Some types of disability make it harder for a young person to physically defend themselves or remove themselves from a dangerous situation.
- While other types of disability can make violence and abuse more difficult for a young person to recognise and understand. Especially if an authority figure is deliberately misinforming them.
- It can be more difficult for young people with disability to report or leave violent and abusive situations because they may rely on their abusers to help them meet their basic needs.
- Widespread discrimination can reinforce internalised ableism, causing a young person with disability to believe that they don't deserve respect or better treatment from the people in their lives.
- Many young people with disability do not have the option of staying at temporary crisis accommodation when fleeing from violent or abusive homes because most crisis accommodation is not accessible.



While some of these factors exist due to the physical or cognitive effects of specific disabilities, it is very important to understand that this increased vulnerability does not exist simply because young people with disability are inherently *weaker* than their able-bodied peers.

In fact, this increased vulnerability exists just as much because of the systemic mistreatment and misunderstanding of young people with disability, as this frequently places them in vulnerable positions.

IF READING THIS INFORMATION HAS BROUGHT UP ANY CHALLENGING EMOTIONS, YOU CAN CALL:



1800 RESPECT: **1800 737 732**

This service is available 24 hours a day Australia wide

Domestic Violence Helpline: **1800 007 339**

This service is available 24 hours a day in Western Australia

Or you can access the online chat available through 1800 RESPECT:

<https://chat.1800respect.org.au/#/welcome>

OTHER HELPFUL RESOURCES:

1. **The Ann Craft Trust** explaining the relationship between disability and domestic abuse: <https://www.anncrafttrust.org/disability-domestic-abuse/>
2. **1800 RESPECT** provides this guide for recognising forms of abuse: <https://www.1800respect.org.au/inclusive-practice/supporting-people-with-disability>
3. **The NSW Government** provides many examples of what abuse may look like for people with disability: <https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/domestic-violence/my-situation/im-a-person-with-disability#What-is-domestic-violence>
4. **The National Domestic Violence Hotline** outlines non-traditional forms of abuse which may be used against people with disability: <https://www.thehotline.org/resources/abuse-in-disability-communities/>
5. **The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare** gives statistics which help to understand how many people with disability experience abuse: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/disability/people-with-disability-in-australia/contents/justice-and-safety/violence-against-people-with-disability>