

REGISTERED BEHAVIOR TECHNICIAN TRAINING



PREVENTING ABUSE AND NEGLECT OF INDIVIDUALS WITH
DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

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Making a Difference in Children's Lives!

DISCLAIMER

This is a very sensitive topic. Many may feel upset, angry, sad, or triggered by the content of this video. However, abuse and neglect is a very real threat to all individuals, but particularly to those impacted with developmental disabilities. Being trained and aware of the signs and how you can help is the first step in helping an individual live a full and healthy life.

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Identify what makes individuals with developmental disabilities a vulnerable population.
- Define abuse: mental, emotional, physical, sexual, financial exploitation, and neglect.
- Explain the signs and indicators of abuse/neglect.
- Identify and implement strategies to prevent/reduce abuse and neglect.

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TASK LIST ITEMS

- A-6
- D-6
- E-1, E-2, E-4, E-5
- F-5

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ABUSE

- Treating another person with cruelty or violence, especially regularly or repeatedly
- Types of abuse:
 - Physical
 - Sexual
 - Emotional/mental

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PHYSICAL ABUSE

- Includes (but not limited to) intentional shaking, kicking, biting, beating, punching, slapping, and burning
- Note: "Corporal punishment" (spanking) is legal in many states, but "excessive corporal punishment" (causes pain or leaves a mark) is illegal and reportable in most states.

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SEXUAL ABUSE

Unwanted sexual activity, with perpetrators using force, making threats, or taking advantage of victims not able to give consent

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MENTAL/EMOTIONAL ABUSE

- Any act of confinement, isolation, verbal assault, humiliation, intimidation, infantilization, or any other treatment which may diminish the sense of identity, dignity, and self worth
- Yelling/swearing, name calling/insults, threats/intimidation, ignoring/excluding, isolation, humiliation, denial of abuse/victim blaming

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NEGLECT

Failure of parent or caregiver to provide food, clothing, shelter, medical care, or supervision to the degree that the child's health, safety, and well-being are threatened with harm

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FINANCIAL EXPLOITATION

"Financial exploitation occurs when a person misuses or takes the assets of a vulnerable adult for his/her own personal benefit. This frequently occurs without the explicit knowledge or consent of a senior or disabled adult, depriving him/her of vital financial resources for his/her personal needs."

www.napsa-now.org

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HOW OFTEN DOES IT OCCUR?

- It is difficult to identify an exact number because of underreporting, but it is estimated that children with disabilities are more than **twice as likely** to be physically or sexually abused than their neuro-typical peers (Crosse et.al., 1993).
- While children with disabilities make up 10.4% of the population, they represent 25.9% of children with maltreatment and 29% of those with sustained allegations (McLean et .al., 2017).

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FAMILY OR PARENTAL RISK FACTORS

- **Lack of support:** Parenting a child with special needs takes a lot of extra time and resources which can leave a caregiver exhausted and isolated. Due to the decrease in social connections, they may be unaware of the risk of maltreatment for their child.
- **Poverty:** Low-income families often have additional stressors as a result of low income, including housing instability, poor social connections, and underperforming schools. These families may not have access to quality services.
- **Stress and physical health:** Having a child with special needs often comes with extra stress such as financial costs and the physical and emotional well-being of their parent/ caregiver. High levels of stress can decrease a person's abilities to provide appropriate care for another person.

www.childwelfare.gov

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INSTITUTIONAL OR NONFAMILIAL MALTREATMENT RISK FACTORS

- Most maltreatment of individuals with disabilities is done by family members, but these individuals are also at risk by other caregivers (Lightfoot, Hill & La Liberte, 2011).
- Group homes, long-term care facilities, hospitals, and other out-of-home care is twice as likely for school-aged children with disabilities.
- These environments can be isolating and allow easy access by others, increasing the risk of maltreatment.
- Many of these facilities also have frequent staff turnover which poses additional risks for the individual's safety (Palusci et. al, 2015).

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ASR #1

True or False:

According to some research, children with disabilities are twice as likely to be victims of abuse and neglect than their neurotypical peers.

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ASR #1 ANSWER

True or False:

According to some research, children with disabilities are twice as likely to be victims of abuse and neglect than their neurotypical peers.

True

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WHY ARE CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES MORE VULNERABLE?

- Children may not report their own abuse because they don't understand what abuse is or what acts are considered abusive.
- Communication problems make it difficult for children to understand and/or verbalize episodes of abuse (Knutson & Sullivan, 1993).
- Parents can be more easily stressed by parenting a child with a disability and can become more easily frustrated and likely to respond harshly.
- Abusers may take advantage of kids who have problems speaking, hearing, or who don't understand social situations very well.

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WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO BE AWARE OF THE SIGNS OF ABUSE?

- Children with disabilities are more likely to be abused and/or neglected.
- Children with disabilities are at greater risk of abuse going unnoticed because their behavior change can be attributed to their disability instead of abuse.
- Children with disabilities may be viewed as untrustworthy or easily suggestible.

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SIGNS OF PHYSICAL ABUSE

- Physical signs such as frequent bruises, bite marks, or excessive scratches
- Unexplained fractures, particularly in facial area
- Immersion, rope, or cigarette burns
- Sudden changes in behavior (more aggressive/passive)
- Is always watchful/nervous (as though waiting for something bad to happen)

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PARENTAL/CAREGIVER SIGNS OF PHYSICAL ABUSE

- Offers conflicting, unconvincing, or no explanation for child's injury
- Describes the child in a negative way
- Uses harsh discipline with the child

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SIGNS OF EMOTIONAL ABUSE

- Stomachaches
- Regressive behaviors (bedwetting)
- Low self-esteem or depression
- Behavior extremes (aggressiveness or passivity)
- Obsessive or compulsive behavior
- Habit formation like rocking/head banging

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PARENT/CAREGIVER SIGNS OF EMOTIONAL/MENTAL ABUSE

- Overtly rejects the child
- Unconcerned about the child
- Blames, belittles, or berates child

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SIGNS OF SEXUAL ABUSE

- Regressive behaviors such as bed wetting
- Age-inappropriate knowledge of sexual matters
- Trouble sitting or walking
- Child runs away
- Sudden change in appetite
- Genital bleeding, bruising, or pain

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PARENTAL/CAREGIVER SIGNS OF SEXUAL ABUSE

- Overly protective of the child or limits child's contact with other children, especially of the opposite sex
- Acts jealous or controlling with family members
- Is isolated/secretive

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SIGNS OF NEGLECT

- Physical or medical needs unattended to
- Bad hygiene
- Fatigue
- Constant hunger
- Alone for long periods of time
- Lacks sufficient clothing for weather
- Beggars or steals food or money

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PARENTAL/CAREGIVER SIGNS OF NEGLECT

- Shows little concern for the child's well-being
- Seems apathetic or depressed
- Behaves irrationally
- Drug/alcohol abuse

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WHAT IF A CHILD IS NON-VERBAL?

- If a child is non-verbal, it can be more difficult to identify abuse/neglect.
- Keep an eye out for the child becoming more socially withdrawn, avoiding particular places and people, or sudden development of aggression.

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HOW TO PREVENT ABUSE/NEGLECT

- Know the signs in both children and parents.
- Maximize children's communication skills and tools.
- Help children protect themselves: teaching body parts and distinguishing appropriate vs. inappropriate.
- Team approach: involve families in meetings.
- Collaborate with other professionals.
- Provide training for parents and caregivers.

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RESOURCES TO PREVENT ABUSE AND NEGLECT

• **For families:** 24/7 Dad, Changing Children's World Foundation, The Circle of Security, Compassionate Child Rearing: A Parenting Education Program

• **School-based prevention programs:** Child Protection in Schools: A Four-Part Solution, Educate and Prevent Child Abuse, Speak Up Be Safe

www.childwelfare.gov/topics/preventing

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PREVENTING ABUSE AND NEGLECT

- Encourage training and continuing education about violence against children with disabilities.
- Advocate for family support programs such as respite care.

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WHAT DO YOU DO IF YOU SUSPECT ABUSE OR NEGLECT?

If you see something, say something!

You are obligated to report a potential concern to your supervisor. You and your supervisor are **mandated reporters**. Your supervisor can help decide the next step. Together the team will ensure that our clients are safe and the family gets the support that they need.

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MANDATED REPORTING

BCBAs, RBTs, and anyone who works with children or vulnerable populations are required by law to report:

1. Any suspicion of client abuse or neglect (intentional or unintentional)
2. If a client is in danger of hurting themselves (suicidal) or others (homicidal) as expressed through verbal or non-verbal threats
3. Any suspicion of domestic violence in the home: emotional, vocal, physical abuse by those in an intimate relationship

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RBTs AND THE STEPS FOR MANDATORY REPORTING

1. Call your supervisor **immediately** if you see, hear, or sense something uncomfortable or that you find unusual.
2. Your supervisor will organize the reporting process to the department of Child and Family Services who will then conduct a proper investigation and proceed only with evidence.

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MODULE SUMMARY

- Defined types of abuse and neglect
- Identified why the disabled population may be easier targets for abuse
- Defined and identified warning signals of abuse
- Defined mandated reported
- Identified steps to take to prevent abuse and neglect
- Identified steps to take if you suspect abuse and neglect

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