



DISABILITY AND SEXUAL ASSAULT

People with disabilities have a higher risk of sexual assault and violence than people without disabilities (3). There could be many reasons for this:

- Violence and abuse often reflect larger issues of power in society.
- People with disabilities are often left out of:
 - important education
 - chances to build systems of support
 - freedom to be independent
- People may target people with disabilities because they believe negative ideas about them. People may think that they:
 - are less likely to fight back.
 - will not report or be believed.
 - are more likely to be intimidated and manipulated.

A person with a disability may only have close relationships with a few family members or care providers. However, 32% of their abusers are family members and 44% are caregivers, home health aides, or living facility staff. 97%-99% of people who abuse people with disabilities are someone the survivor knows and trusts (2).

FACTS

1. More than 1 in 4 people in the United States have a disability. (3)
 2. According to the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS), 39% of female survivors of rape and 24% of male survivors of sexual violence were people with disabilities. (4)
 3. Women with disabilities are twice as likely as women without disabilities to experience sexual violence in their lifetimes. (1)
 4. Children with disabilities are over two times more likely to experience violence than children without disabilities. (5)
 5. From 2017-2019 only 19% of rapes or sexual assaults against people with disabilities were reported to police, compared to 36% of those crimes against non-disabled people. (2)
-

SOURCES

1. [American Journal for Preventative Medicine, Sexual Violence Against Women with Disabilities: Experiences with Force and Lifetime Risk. \(2022\).](#)
2. [Bureau of Justice Statistics, Crime Against Persons with Disabilities, 2009-2019 Statistical Tables. \(2021\).](#)
3. [Centers for Disease Control, Disability Impacts All of Us. \(2023\).](#)
4. [Centers for Disease Control, Sexual Violence and Intimate Partner Violence Among People with Disabilities. \(2020\).](#)
5. [The Lancet, Global Estimates of Violence Against Children with Disabilities: An Updated Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. \(2022\).](#)

WARNING SIGNS OF SEXUAL ABUSE

Possible physical warning signs:

- bruises
- genital discomfort
- torn or missing clothing
- unexplained pregnancy
- sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)
- changes in bathroom habits

Behavioral warning signs:

- telling someone about the abuse
- depression
- anxiety
- avoiding specific settings or people
- resistance to exams
- lower self-esteem
- inappropriate sexual behavior
- eating disorders
- changed sleeping habits

PREVENTING SEXUAL ABUSE

One great way to prevent abuse is education! Everyone should understand:

- privacy
- boundaries
- self-advocacy
- positive sexuality
- human sexual development
- use of emergency services
- healthy relationships
- power dynamics
- pregnancy and contraception
- sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)

Inclusion is prevention! More social connections teaches people with disabilities how to have healthy relationships and increases their support network.

It is important to challenge harmful practices and messages about people with disabilities.

- Allow people with disabilities to make decisions. Avoid forcing compliance.
- Challenge someone who treats a person with a disability like they are a child.
- Train caregivers on how to encourage consent, decision making, and self-advocacy.
- Advocate for access to sexual and health education.
- Intervene or help when you see someone causing harm.

FOR HELP AND SUPPORT

Survivors of sexual assault will often seek help from someone they trust.

Be an advocate: step in when help is needed. Listen to and believe survivors of abuse.

The Harborview Abuse & Trauma Center provides medical and mental health services. Call us at 206-744-1600.

For Washington Relay Service, call 1-800-833-6388.

Llamar: (206) 520-5222 para ayuda en español y solicitar nuestra oficina.