

Serving Survivors of Sexual Assault with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

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April 27, 2021

Goals for Today

Participants will better understand:

- ☐ Sexual violence against individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.
- ☐ Factors that impact victims of sexual violence who have intellectual and developmental disabilities
- ☐ Tips for working with individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities who have experienced sexual violence.
- ☐ Experiences and perspectives of survivors with intellectual and developmental disabilities.



Framing the issue: Sexual violence and people with intellectual and developmental disabilities

What are We Talking About?

Sexual Violence

- A non-legal term that refers to crimes such as sexual assault, rape, and sexual abuse.

Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD)

- Intellectual disabilities are usually present at birth and characterized by significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and in adaptive behavior. Developmental disabilities is a broader category that originates before the age of 18 that can be intellectual, physical, or both.
- Some examples of intellectual and developmental disabilities include Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Down Syndrome, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and Intellectual Disability.

What We Know

The rate of sexual assault
against people with
intellectual disabilities is
7x
the rate against people
without disabilities

For women with intellectual
disabilities, the rate is
12x
higher.

These numbers comes from data run for National Public Radio by the Justice Department from unpublished federal crime data. (Shapiro, J. (2018) [The Sexual Assault Epidemic No One Talks About](#))

What We Know (2)

Sexual Abuse Interview for those
With Developmental Disabilities.
Valenti-Hein, D. & Schwartz, L.
(1995).

49%
of people with developmental
disabilities are assaulted
**10 or more
times.**

More than 90%
of people with developmental
disabilities will experience
sexual abuse in their lives.

People of color with intellectual and developmental disabilities likely experience sexual violence at even greater rates, but **no research exists.**



Sexual violence and people with intellectual and developmental disabilities

Why Higher Rates of Sexual Violence?

- Devaluation;
- Presumed lack of credibility;
- Isolation and segregation;
- Culture of compliance;
- Given little control over life choices;
- Perceived as “ideal victims”;
- Increased exposure to perpetrators; and
- Denied information about healthy relationships, consent, and sexuality.

Sexual Violence: Tactics

Offenders use a variety of tactics against people with disabilities that leverage the stereotypes about disabilities and take advantage of the control society has over them. Below are some of the tactics that offenders may use against people with disabilities.



Tactics Include

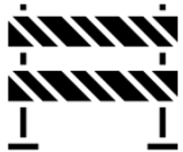
- Manipulation
- Isolation
- Exploiting trusting nature
- Obtaining volunteer positions at agencies that have less stringent requirements
- Taking advantage of denial of sexual education or knowledge
- Targeting people for perceived vulnerabilities
- Becoming a relied upon or primary caregiver before beginning the abuse
- Leveraging the fear of institutionalization and isolation

Lack of Access to Victim Services

13%

of victims with
disabilities receive
services.

Why are Survivors with IDD Less Likely to Get Services and Support?



Physical, communication, programmatic, and attitudinal barriers in victim services, law enforcement, and the legal system.



Lack of specialized knowledge and response in organizations that serve people with IDD.



Lack of specialized training for staff, resources, and awareness of accommodations.



Best practices for working with survivors with intellectual and developmental disabilities

Foundational Things to Remember

- A survivor with a disability is a person who is entitled to the dignity, consideration, respect, and rights that you expect for yourself.
- Meet the survivor where they are at.
- Recognize a survivor's culture, background, and lived experiences.
- Treat adults as adults.
- Believe the survivor.
- The survivor is the expert in what they need, ask them how you can help. Be prepared to meet their needs.

Foundational Things to Remember (2)

- Don't assume a survivor has IDD or *any* type of disability and don't ask---focus on what will help them participate in services.
- The survivor might not know what they need – be prepared to offer.
- Offer to stop for a break if the survivor is tiring out or getting upset.
- Ask if the survivor needs anything.
- Don't be afraid of making mistakes or offering help.

Meeting the Needs of Survivors with IDD

Some people with IDD may have difficulty reading and understanding information being provided verbally, especially following trauma.

Accommodations might include:

- Identify a *safe* support person, if the survivor requests their help.
- Offer assistance completing forms or understanding written instructions.
- Provide extra time for decision-making.

Meeting the Needs of Survivors with IDD (2)

- Put written information in plain language or easy to read formats.
- Use pictures and illustrations to help explain concepts.
- Read material to the person in a way that helps them understand the content.
- Check the understanding of the individual - have them repeat back what they heard in their own words.
- Adjust the pace of the interview, as needed.
- Re-word questions as needed.

Meeting the Needs of Survivors with IDD(3)

Some people with IDD may have difficulty speaking or communicating, especially following trauma.

Accommodations might include:

- Concentrate on what the survivor is saying.
- Be patient. Take as much time as necessary. It might take longer to understand.
- Do not speak for the survivor or attempt to finish their sentences.
- Try to ask questions that require only short answers or a nod of the head.

Meeting the Needs of Survivors with IDD (4)

- If you do not understand something the survivor says, do not pretend that you do. Ask the person to repeat what they said and then repeat it back.
- If you are having difficulty understanding the survivor, consider writing as an alternative means of communicating, but first ask if this is acceptable.
- A survivor may use a communication board (be familiar with them), but this tool may not have the words needed to explain what happened.
- Identify a person who can act as a communication facilitator (a person familiar with their speech disability), with permission.

Other Communication Tips

- If orientation to time is difficult, use common events, like daily meals, work or school, to narrow down when something happened.
- If the survivor has difficulty with attention, eliminate distractions in the area you are meeting. Take breaks.
- Try to avoid asking yes/no questions.
- Avoid asking “why” questions. It is difficult to answer and cause the survivor to feel bad that they are unable to answer you.
- Ask one question at a time.

Other Communication Tips (2)

- Orient survivors to your agency, exam rooms or even courtrooms to help them acclimate to the surroundings.
- Pause after asking questions. Do not rush the survivor if they take a long time to respond. Give them time for processing and finding the words needed to relay their experiences.

Tips on Making Services More Accessible Overall

- Train staff on disability – and IDD specifically – and accommodations.
 - Budget for accommodations.
 - Create outreach materials that use plain language and images.
 - Learn about issues that might impact survivors with IDD, such as guardianship laws and mandatory reporting laws.
 - Work with programs that serve people with IDD to conduct outreach.
 - Employ people with IDD to provide peer advocacy services.
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Interview with Leigh Ann Barry

Questions?

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