

# Signs of Sexual Misconduct and Abuse for People with Disabilities

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People with intellectual disabilities are sexually assaulted at a rate **seven times higher** than those without disabilities.

According to the National Disability and Abuse Project, 70% of individuals living with a disability experienced some form of abuse.

**Disability:** Any condition of the body or mind that makes it more difficult for the person with the condition to do certain activities and interact with the world around them.

Example: Uses a wheelchair, amputation, cognitive impairment, visual, hearing, physical



**Intellectual/Developmental Disability:** A person has certain limitations in cognitive functioning; including conceptual, and practical skills, such as language, social and self-care.

Example: Autism, Down Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, Traumatic Brain Injury, Dementia

What **increases** the **risk** of sexual misconduct and victimization for people with disabilities?

# Disability and Increased Risk for Sexual Abuse and Victimization

- May be perceived as more vulnerable
- May be perceived as less likely to report
- Physical limitations
- Communication impairment
- May be unaware of abuse due to cognitive impairment
- Privacy invaded more often and at an early age
- Compliance is reinforced
- Abuser is more likely to be someone in their close circle
  - Examples: caregivers, medical staff, school staff, peers, community members, someone in their daily routine, typically someone they know

What are potential **barriers** to **reporting** for people with intellectual disabilities?

# Barriers to Reporting for People with Disabilities

- Communication challenges due to disability
- Fear they won't be believed
- Fear of retaliation
- Fear of losing a caregiver, so they believe they have to tolerate a certain level of abuse
- Fear of losing choice about living circumstances
- They don't know where to report
- Perceived lack of credibility because of their disability
- Lack of accessible resources to report



## Warning Signs of Sexual Misconduct for People with Disabilities

- **Physical Evidence:** STI, UTI, unplanned pregnancy, difficulty walking/sitting, stained/missing clothing, incontinence, bruises, abdominal pain, genital pain.
- **Behavioral Evidence:** Depression, PTSD, social withdrawal, new fear of people/places, nightmares, not wanting to be left alone, appetite changes, irritability, inappropriate knowledge for their age.

**"It happens to people like us because we're  
easy targets to take advantage of."**

*- Cindy, from Austin, Texas*

**"I can remember everything. Even though  
I have a disability, I still remember it."**

*- Kathleen, from suburbs of Philadelphia*

**"We are taught to trust grown-ups more  
than anyone else would be"**

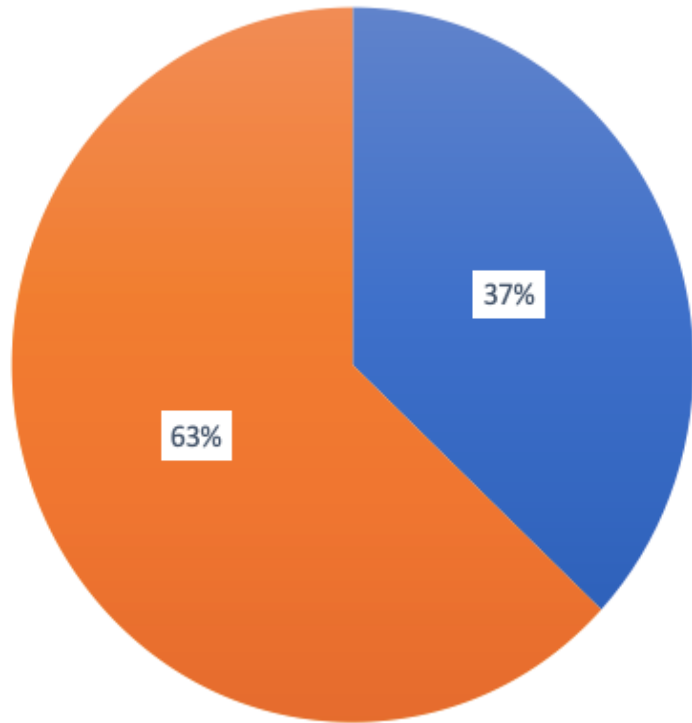
*- Thomas, from Washington, D.C*

**"Yes, it's happened to me. It was a staff person. And  
I trusted him. "**

*- Sam, from Meadville, Pennsylvania*

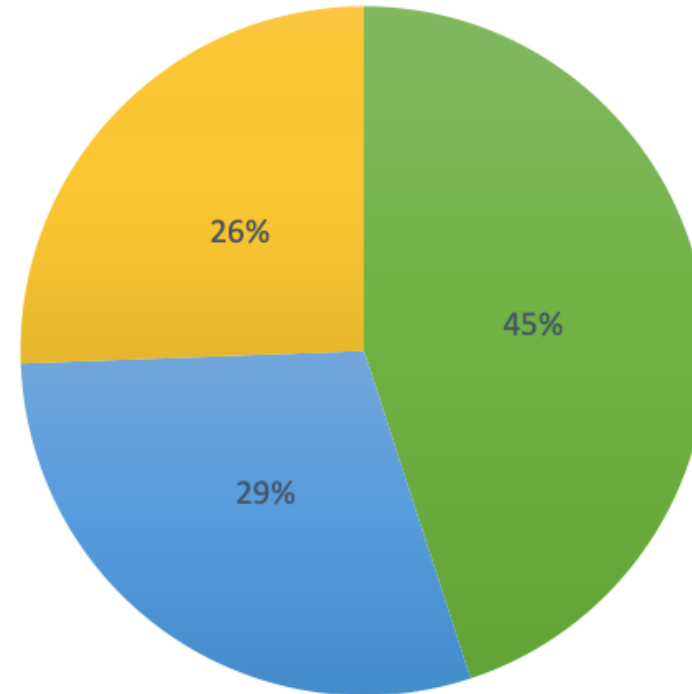
# Reporting and Disability

## Reporting Abuse



■ Reported ■ Did Not Report

## Why they didn't report



■ Believed nothing would happen ■ Threatened or afraid ■ Didn't know how or where

# Mandated Reporting

**“Vulnerable adult” is defined as anyone 18+ who is unable to protect themselves from harm because of a mental or physical impairment.**

# Accommodating Individuals with Disabilities in the Title IX Process

- Confirm the disability and make necessary accommodations
- Document your rationale for accommodation
- List accessibility services office as an available resource
- Provide links to accessibility services in Title IX FAQs
- Include potential communication services and website accessibility
- Offer help in complaint filing to qualified disabled students
  
- Examples: Extra time for documents, slow down your questions, allow processing time, use notes, interpreter, sign language, visual aides, neutral communicators, reframe questions appropriately, etc.

“All students with disabilities in a school disciplinary proceeding have a right to reasonable accommodations under Section 504 and the ADA.”

Instead of asking "Do you feel safe at home..?"

**Try...**

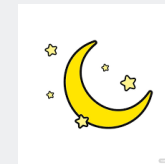
"Who is someone you trust?"

"Do you have someone you can talk to at home?"

"Do you feel comfortable asking them for help if you need it?"

"Are you sleeping through the night?"

"Do you have privacy?"



# Practice Scenario

A professor is working with 19-year-old Bernie. While in class, Bernie's shirt lifted and exposed a long bruise in the middle of his back. Due to his disability, Bernie is not able to communicate how the bruise occurred. Bernie does not have a history of falls or self-injuring behavior. The professor contacts Title IX.

# Practice Scenario

An individual living in the residence hall on a University Campus is diagnosed with a hearing impairment. What is one way you can accommodate their disability if they wish to report a personal incident of harassment to Title IX?





# Preventing Victimization for Individuals living with a disability

- Extra effort to makes reporting accessible to everyone
- Teach consent, autonomy, privacy/boundaries, sex education
- Universal design – creating products that are accessible to people with a wide range or abilities, disabilities, and other characteristics
- Training for all student and employees that includes people living with disabilities
- Work together with School Office Accessibility and Title IX
- Make necessary accommodations for qualified disability

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# Questions?

Thank you for listening



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