

## Physical and Sexual Abuse among Consumers with Developmental Disabilities

Physical and sexual abuse are serious problems for children and adults with developmental disabilities. If you have a developmental disability, you are more likely to be abused than other people. Because of this, it is very important for you, your family, and the people who provide your services and supports to learn about what abuse is, how to tell if someone is being abused, and what to do if you have reason to believe someone is being abused.

### What is abuse?

- **Physical abuse** happens when someone hurts you on purpose in ways that may cause injury or pain.
  - For example, physical abuse includes things like hitting, kicking, shaking, burning, pinching, biting, choking, throwing, and shoving.
  - Physical abuse can also include giving you medications that you don't really need, using physical restraints to tie you down when they are not really needed, and forcing you to eat when you don't need or want to.
- **Sexual abuse** is sexual touching in ways or places that make you feel uncomfortable, or that you don't want.
  - Sexual abuse happens when someone touches you in ways or places that make you feel uncomfortable.
  - Sexual abuse is unwanted sexual contact—including unwanted sexual touching of any kind.
  - Sexual contact with a person who does not understand what is happening is also sexual abuse.
  - If someone makes you take off your clothes, or takes pictures of you in a way that makes you uncomfortable, that can also be sexual abuse.

You can be abused by a stranger or by someone you know. It is sometimes hard to tell whether or not you are being abused. If you feel uncomfortable with the way someone is treating you, you should **tell someone you trust!**

### Why are people with developmental disabilities abused more often than other people?

If you have a developmental disability, you are more likely to be abused than people who do not have a developmental disability. Some of the reasons for this are:

- You may depend on other people for your daily care, chores and transportation. Because you depend on supports, this means that it can be hard for you to get away from the person who may be abusing you.
- You may depend on supports for your personal physical needs, like dressing and bathing, so it may seem normal for people to touch sensitive areas of your body. This can make it hard for you to understand, or to tell, what type of touching is okay and what is not.

- Your disability may make it hard for you to talk with others. It can also mean that you have trouble knowing what words to use. If you cannot talk or find the right words, you may not be able to tell others when someone does something to make you believe that he, or she, is abusing you.
- People who care about you and provide support, like your family members, support professionals, and other professionals, sometimes feel a lot of stress. Sometimes they do not have much time to see their friends and do things that they enjoy. Stress and being away from friends can make them hurt or abuse someone that they care for.

These are just some of the reasons why you may be in more danger of being abused than people without developmental disabilities.

### **Signs and symptoms of abuse**

It is important for you to understand the signs and symptoms of abuse. Sometimes people who are being abused don't tell anyone about it because they are afraid or don't know what words to use. But, you can have good reasons to believe that you or someone you know is being abused even if they do not tell you. For example, a person who is being abused may:

- Feel or act very upset for a long time
- Lose skills or confidence
- Change their behavior or mood
- Seem frightened of certain people or situations
- Become violent
- Not want to talk to anyone.

People who are being physically abused often have:

- Unexplained burns, bites, bruises, broken bones, or black eyes
- Other untreated injuries.

People who are being sexually abused often have:

- Bruises around their breasts or genital areas
- Unexplained bleeding around their genital areas
- Torn or bloody clothing.

These are just some of the reasons that you could have for believing that someone is being abused. You should remember that everyone deals with abuse in their own way, and you could have reasons that are not in our list here. If you have good reasons to believe that you or someone you know is being abused, you can tell someone you trust, even if you don't see any of these signs or symptoms.

## What to do about abuse

If you have good reasons to believe that you or someone you know is being abused, the best thing to do is to tell another person you trust. You can tell anyone who you think will help you. This may be a friend, a family member, a direct support professional or any other support personnel.

The law says certain people **MUST** make a report if they have good reason to believe that abuse or neglect has happened; this is called *mandated reporting*. These people are mandated reporters in California:

- Direct support professionals and service coordinators
- Doctors, nurses and other healthcare providers
- Mental health professionals and other counselors
- Social workers
- Teachers
- Other types of support providers who care for or supervise people.

The law protects people who make reports. No one will know that you made a report. Also, you cannot be punished for making a report, even if you are wrong.

If you have good reasons to believe that you or someone you know is being abused, you can make a report to any of these professionals:

- If you have good reasons to believe that a child is being abused, call your county's Child Welfare Services Agency.
- If you have good reasons to believe that an adult is being abused, call your county's Adult Protective Services Agency.
- If you have good reasons to believe that abuse is happening in a long-term care facility or nursing home, call your county's Long Term Care Ombudsman and Community Care Licensing Office.
- If you have good reasons to believe that someone is being abused, you can also tell your Service Coordinator or the Special Incident Report officer at your regional center.

Phone numbers for each county in California are listed in the table at the end of this article.

There are things other people can do to help prevent abuse, too. Direct Service Providers can help prevent abuse by making sure they learn how to provide support to people with developmental disabilities, how to tell when abuse might be happening and how to report it. Programs that give caregivers and family members time to talk about their problems and relieve stress in their lives can also help to prevent abuse.

**Sources for this article include:**

- Prevent Child Abuse America - [www.preventchildabuse.org](http://www.preventchildabuse.org)
- Childhelp USA – [www.childhelpusa.org](http://www.childhelpusa.org)
- National Center on Elder Abuse – [www.ncea.acl.gov](http://www.ncea.acl.gov)
- Child Welfare Information Gateway – [www.childwelfare.gov/index.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/index.cfm)

**PHONE NUMBERS TO CALL TO REPORT ABUSE**

<b>County</b>	<b>Child Welfare Services</b>	<b>Adult Protective Services</b>	<b>Long Term Care Ombudsman</b>
<b>Alameda</b>	(510) 259-1800	(510) 567-6894	(510) 638-6878
<b>Alpine</b>	(888) 755-8099 (530) 694-2235	(888) 755-8099	(209) 532-7632
<b>Amador</b>	(209) 223-6550 (209) 223-1075	(209) 223-1075	(209) 532-7632
<b>Butte</b>	(530) 538-7617 (800) 400-0902	(800) 664-9774	(530) 898-5923 (800) 822-0109
<b>Calaveras</b>	(209) 754-6452 (209) 754-6500	(209) 754-6500	(209) 532-7632
<b>Colusa</b>	(530) 458-0280	(530) 458-0280	(530) 898-5923 (800) 822-0109
<b>Contra Costa</b>	(925) 646-1680 (510) 374-3324	(877) 839-4347	(925) 685-2070
<b>Del Norte</b>	(707) 464-3191	(707) 464-3191	(707) 443-9747
<b>El Dorado</b>	(530) 544-7236 (530) 642-7100	(800) 925-1812	(530) 621-6157
<b>Fresno</b>	(559) 255-8320	(559) 255-3383	(559) 224-9177
<b>Glenn</b>	(530) 934-6520	(530) 934-6520	(530) 898-5923 (800) 822-0109
<b>Humboldt</b>	(707) 445-6180	(707) 445-6180	(707) 443-9747
<b>Imperial</b>	(760) 337-7750	(760) 337-7878	(760) 339-6457
<b>Inyo</b>	(760) 872-1727	(800) 841-5011	(760) 872-4128
<b>Kern</b>	(661) 631-6011	(661) 868-1006 (800) 277-7866	(661) 323-7884 (888) 292-4252 (ext. 109)
<b>Kings</b>	(559) 582-8776	(559) 582-8776 (877) 897-5842	(559) 583-0333
<b>Lake</b>	(707) 262-0235	(800) 386-4090	(707) 468-5882 (800) 997-3675
<b>Lassen</b>	(530) 251-8277 (530) 257-6121	(530) 251-8158	(530) 223-6191
<b>Los Angeles</b> <b>Region I – Santa Monica</b> <b>Region II – Los Angeles</b>	(800) 540-4000 (213) 639-4500	(877) 477-3646	(310) 393-3618 (800) 334-9473 (310) 899-1483 (213) 617-8957

<b>County</b>	<b>Child Welfare Services</b>	<b>Adult Protective Services</b>	<b>Long Term Care Ombudsman</b>
<b>Region III – Reseda Region IV – Arcadia Region V – Lakewood Region VI – San Dimas Region VII – Lancaster Region VIII – Downey Region IX – Burbank Region X – Santa Monica</b>			(818) 757-1580 (626) 793-3510 (562) 925-7104 (909) 394-0416 (661) 945-5563 (562) 869-6500 (818) 563-1957 (310) 393-2405
<b>Madera</b>	(559) 675-7829 (800) 801-3999	(559) 675-7839	(559) 224-9177
<b>Marin</b>	(415) 499-7154 (415) 479-1601	(415) 507-2774	(415) 499-7446
<b>Mariposa</b>	(209) 966-3030	(800) 266-3609	(209) 532-7632
<b>Mendocino</b>	(707) 463-5600	(707) 962-1102	(707) 468-5882 (800) 997-3675
<b>Merced</b>	(209) 385-3104 (209) 385-9915	(209) 385-3105	(209) 385-7402
<b>Modoc</b>	(530) 233-6501 (530) 233-4416	(530) 233-6501	(530) 223-6191
<b>Mono</b>	(760) 932-7755 (800) 340-5411	(800) 340-5411	(760) 872-4128
<b>Monterey</b>	(831) 755-4661	(800) 960-0010	(831) 333-1300 (831) 758-4011
<b>Napa</b>	(707) 253-4261	(888) 619-6913	(707) 255-4236
<b>Nevada</b>	(530) 265-9380	(888) 339-7248	(916) 376-8910 (530) 274-2825
<b>Orange</b>	(714) 940- 1000 (800) 207-4464	(800) 451-5155	(714) 479-0107 (800) 300-6222
<b>Placer</b>	(530) 886-5401 (916) 787-8860	(888) 886-5401	(916) 376-8910 (530) 823-8422
<b>Plumas</b>	(530) 283-6350	(530) 283-6471	(530) 898-5923 (800) 822-0109
<b>Riverside</b>	(800) 442-4918	(800) 491-7123	(951) 686-4402 (800) 464-1123
<b>Sacramento</b>	(916) 875-5437	(916) 874-9377	(916) 376-8910
<b>San Benito</b>	(831) 636-4190 (831) 636-4330	(831) 636-4190	(831) 429-1913
<b>San Bernardino</b>	(800) 827-8724 (909) 422-3266	(877) 565-2020	(909) 891-3928 (866) 229-0284
<b>San Diego</b>	(858) 560-2191	(858) 495-5660 (800) 339-4661 (800) 227-0997	(858) 560-2507 (800) 640-4661
<b>San Francisco</b>	(415) 558-2650 (800) 856-5553	(800) 814-0009 (415) 557-5230	(415) 751-9788

<b>County</b>	<b>Child Welfare Services</b>	<b>Adult Protective Services</b>	<b>Long Term Care Ombudsman</b>
<b>San Joaquin</b>	(209) 468-1333 (209) 468-1330	(888) 800-4800	(209) 468-3785
<b>San Luis Obispo</b>	(805) 781-5437 (800) 834-5437	(805) 781-1790	(805) 785-0132
<b>San Mateo</b>	(650) 595-7922 (800) 632-4615	(800) 675-8437	(650) 349-7008 (800) 675-8437
<b>Santa Barbara</b>	(800) 367-0166 (805) 737-7078 (805) 683-2724	(805) 899-0061	(805) 967-0499
<b>Santa Clara</b>	(408) 299-2071 (408) 683-0601	(800) 414-2002	(408) 944-0567
<b>Santa Cruz</b>	(831) 454-4222 (831) 763-8850	(866) 580-4357	(831) 429-1913
<b>Shasta</b>	(530) 225-5144	(530) 225-5798	(530) 223-6191
<b>Sierra</b>	(530) 289-3720 (530) 993-6720	(530) 289-3720	(916) 376-8910 (530) 274-2825
<b>Siskiyou</b>	(530) 841-4200 (530) 842-7009	(530) 842-7009	(530) 223-6191
<b>Solano</b>	(800) 544-8696	(800) 850-0012	(707) 644-4194 (800) 644-4194
<b>Sonoma</b>	(707) 565-4304	(800) 667-0404	(707) 526-4106
<b>Stanislaus</b>	(800) 558-3665	(800) 336-4316	(209) 529-3784
<b>Sutter</b>	(530) 822-7155	(530) 822-7227	(916) 376-8910 (530) 755-2018
<b>Tehama</b>	(800) 323-7711 (530) 527-9416	(800) 323-7711	(530) 898-5923 (800) 822-0109
<b>Trinity</b>	(530) 623-1314	(530) 623-1314	(530) 223-6191
<b>Tulare</b>	(800) 331-1585 (559) 730-2677	(800) 321-2462	(559) 583-0333
<b>Tuolumne</b>	(209) 533-5717 (209) 533-4357	(209) 533-4357	(209) 532-7632
<b>Ventura</b>	(805) 654-3200	(805) 654-3200	(805) 656-1986
<b>Yolo</b>	(530) 669-2345 (530) 669-2346 (530) 666-8920 (888) 400-0022	(916) 375-6239 (888) 675-1115	(916) 376-8910 (530) 668-5775
<b>Yuba</b>	(530) 749-6288	(530) 749-6471	(916) 376-8910 (530) 755-2018