

Preventing Physical Abuse

As a service provider there are some things that you can do to reduce the number of incidents of physical abuse. Check the following list and see if there is more that you could do to prevent physical abuse allegations.

- **Screen your employees very carefully.** It is a sad fact that predatory abusers seek employment in care giving positions in order to have access to victims¹. Be certain that you have done all you can to check the background of employees. Check references and follow up to find out why there are gaps in employment. Check with previous employers where the individual may have been employed.
- **Observe workers** as they interact with individuals with disabilities. If you are an employer or a co-worker, you can learn to spot behaviors that may be dangerous to consumers. An employee who has a quick temper with co-workers will probably have the same reaction to consumers.
- If you are a supervisor or a manager, **get a reputation for “dropping in”** or visiting at unscheduled times. This will discourage bad work habits of any type such as sleeping on the job, which could lead to consumer to consumer abuse or other situations of neglect, when no one is watching.
- **Provide adequate training for staff on recognizing and preventing abuse.** Be sure no new employee begins work without a good understanding of what constitutes abuse and neglect. Make it clear that behaviors that may be tolerated in some families such as rough “horseplay” or wrestling with consumers will not be tolerated.
- **Provide training** to all staff and consumers **about reporting of abuse.** Be sure that everyone knows who to call and under what circumstances to report suspected abuse. Post phone numbers and talk about reporting during staff and consumer meetings.
- Promote unscheduled visits from families, service coordinators and friends of the consumers. Assure that consumers are listened to and their opinions are valued. Be sure consumers participate fully in the daily life of their home. An **open atmosphere of mutual respect** is your best weapon in the prevention of abuse.

¹ Petersilia, Joan, Foote, Joseph and Crowell, Nancy A., Editors; Crime Victims with Developmental Disabilities, Report of a Workshop; National Academy Press, 2001.