



Sexual Abuse of People with Disabilities

Sexual assault and abuse of people with disabilities often goes unreported. If you or someone you care about has a disability and has been sexually assaulted or abused, the most important thing to know is that it is never the victim's fault. Help and support are available.

Understanding the crime

People with disabilities are victimized by crime at higher rates than the rest of the population, according to the [National Crime Victimization Survey \(NCVS\)](#). The term "disability," as used by the Department of Justice in the NCVS, includes a wide range of limitations such as sensory (vision, hearing), cognitive, self-care, and ambulatory or mobility limitations.

People with different disabilities may face different challenges and have very different needs. Some disabilities may put people at higher risk for crimes like sexual assault or abuse.

- Someone who needs regular assistance may rely on a person who is abusing them for care, a common factor in [elder abuse](#). The perpetrator may use this power to threaten, coerce, or force someone into non-consensual sex or sexual activities.
- An abuser may take away access to the tools a person with a disability uses to communicate, such as a computer or phone.
- People with disabilities may be less likely to be taken seriously when they make a report of sexual assault or abuse. They may also face challenges in accessing services to make a report in the first place. For example, someone who is Deaf for Deaf-Blind may face challenges accessing communication tools, like a phone, to report the crime or get help.
- Many people with disabilities may not understand or lack information about healthy sexuality and the types of touching that are appropriate or inappropriate. This can be especially challenging if a person's disability requires other people to touch them to provide care.

The role of consent

[Consent](#) is crucial when any person engages in sexual activity, but it plays an even bigger, and potentially more complicated role when someone has a disability. Some disabilities may make it difficult to communicate consent to participate in sexual activity, and perpetrators may take advantage of this. People with disabilities may also not be given the same education about sexuality and consent that people without disabilities receive. In addition, someone who has a developmental or intellectual disability may not have the ability to consent to sexual activity, as defined by the state laws.

In many instances, the person who has a disability may rely on the perpetrator for care or support, making it even more difficult to come forward. Take steps to reduce the risk of something happening to a loved one by [asking prospective caregivers questions about safety](#) and standards of care.

Getting help

Everyone has the right to safety. If you or someone you know has a disability and has experienced sexual assault or abuse, there is support available.

- If you know of or suspect sexual assault or abuse, you can [report it](#). Call your local police station or 911 to contact law enforcement. If the person being abused is considered a vulnerable adult under your state laws, you may also be able to contact the local Department of Human Services or Department of Social Services. Depending on the situation and location, you may be considered a mandatory reporter. Learn more about mandatory reporting in your state from RAINN's [State Law Database](#).
- If you are Deaf, you can access help via video phone 1.855.812.1001 (Monday to Friday 9 a.m.—5 p.m. PST). Learn about other Deaf services at [The National Domestic Violence Hotline](#).
- To speak with someone who is trained to help, call the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 800.656.HOPE (4673) to be connected with your [local sexual assault service provider](#). They may have an advocate in your area who is specially trained to provide the the right kind of support and assistance for your particular situation.
- You can chat online anonymously with a support specialist trained by RAINN at [online.rainn.org](#). The support specialists who answer hotline chats are specially trained to respond with respect, patience, and understanding.

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Find help and the resources you need. Call 800.656.4673