

## Caregiver Abuse of People with Disabilities

A large number of people with disabilities require some form of attendant care and/or home support. They require assistance getting in and out of bed, bathing, getting dressed, going to the bathroom and getting fed. In short, they rely on caregivers for the necessities of life.

People with disabilities have caregivers from a broad spectrum of sources. Some are family, relatives, institution and agency staff, and staff that they hire themselves. Caregivers who abuse are looking for victims who are weak and vulnerable. They look for people who cannot speak out, either because they are mentally handicapped or they cannot physically speak, or defend themselves and who are dependent on them. They also seek out people who would not be credible to authorities such as people with mental disabilities or severe multiple disabilities.

People with disabilities set themselves up to be victims if they are not taught what acceptable boundaries are. Over time people with disabilities who require personal care have their personal space constantly infringed on to the point where they no longer have clear personal boundaries. They also fear being stranded in bed or on the toilet if they speak out. Even if they do speak out people in authority do not take them seriously and/or are faced with conflicting information from the caregiver. Thus the abuse can go on indefinitely.

There are a number of actions that can be taken to prevent and fight abuse. People who are aware of abuse must speak up and not turn a blind-eye. The more people who support people with disabilities in abusive situations the better. People in authority, including the police, must take the reports of abuse seriously. Shelters for abused women must become accessible for people with disabilities so that can escape from their abusers. Institutions and agencies must do periodic random spot checks on their staff while they are on duty. In addition to that, government funding bodies must do service audits on all agencies and institutions by hiring independent outside forensic people to conduct the audits. Agencies and institutions must also set up client/patient support-workers who they can report problems to and who have the authority to deal with them in a timely manner. Any staff who are accused of abuse must be put on leave so that they cannot perpetuate the abuse. Encourage people with disabilities to hire their own home support workers because this puts them in a position of power. People who do not have the money to hire their own workers can apply for individualized funding through The Choice in Supports for Independent Living (CSIL) Program. Create programs for people with disabilities to teach them how to prevent being a victim of abuse as well as programs to assist people to recover and heal from an abusive experience.

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