



Missouri Developmental Disabilities Council
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Personal Safety and Well-Being

The Missouri Developmental Disabilities Council's Position:

People with disabilities have the right to be free from abuse, neglect, and exploitation including, but not limited to, physical, emotional, sexual, fiscal, and cyber victimization. Missouri must develop ways to prevent the abuse of people with disabilities and ensure that they can report abuse and have their reports taken seriously, treated appropriately, and investigated fully.

The Missouri Developmental Disabilities Council's Reasons:

People with disabilities are far more likely to be the victims of abuse, neglect, and exploitation than those without disabilities. Studies have found that children with disabilities are 3.4 times more likely to be abused or neglected than their peers without disabilities,¹ 20% more likely to be bullied,² and are often the victims of cyber bullying.³ Studies have also found that people with disabilities are 3 times more likely to be the victims of violent abuse,⁴ 10 times more likely to be sexually abused,⁵ and 12 times more likely to be robbed.⁶ In a national survey involving more than 1,400 people with disabilities, over 70% reported that they had been the victims of abuse; of those reporting abuse, 87% stated that they had been emotionally abused, 50% said they had been physically abused, 41% reported sexual abuse, 37% said they had been neglected, and 31% reported fiscal exploitation.⁷

Disturbingly, the abuse of people with disabilities is less likely to be reported to authorities and, when reported, is less likely to result in criminal investigation and prosecution.⁸ A nationwide survey found that when people with disabilities reported abuse to authorities, nothing happened in 52% of cases and arrests were made in only 9%.⁹

In our most recent Statewide Needs Assessment, 20% of respondents stated that they were aware of physical abuse in their community, 16% were aware of sexual abuse, and 21% were aware of financial abuse. Approximately two-thirds of respondents stated that incidents involving safety and security were not handled well by authorities.¹⁰

The Missouri Developmental Disabilities Council's Recommendations:

- As a state and society, we must acknowledge that people with disabilities have the right to be full, equal and valued members of their communities, free from abuse, neglect, and exploitation of all kinds, and the right to be treated with the dignity and respect afforded to all citizens.
- First responders and mandated reporters should receive training in how to respond to complaints made by people with disabilities and in interviewing people with disabilities who report or may have been the victims of abuse, neglect, or exploitation.
- Crisis Intervention Teams, Trauma Informed Care, and other models designed to improve interaction between first responders, professionals, and people with disabilities should be reviewed and adapted as necessary to ensure that people with disabilities are treated fairly and their concerns and complaints are fully investigated.
- An effective, accessible complaint reporting system should be developed and implemented, such as the on-line complaint form discussed at www.AndWeCanStopIt.Org.
- Education and training material should be developed and implemented for people with disabilities, through programs such as Consumer Directed Supports, to help them recognize, avoid, and report abuse, including material on sexuality.
- Because research has found a relationship between self-determination and safety,¹¹ programs for people with disabilities should include supports designed to educate and empower them to make their own decisions and be full, equal, and valued members of their communities.

References

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8. Reiter, S., *et al.*, *supra* note 6.
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10. See, <http://moddcouncil.org/pageDownload.php?docID=455>
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This document was developed in partnership and with support from the Missouri Developmental Disabilities Council (PL 106-402) and Something Else Solutions, LLC.