



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, particularly those with intellectual and developmental disabilities, are far more likely to be the victims of abuse, neglect, and exploitation than those without disabilities.¹ Studies have found that up to 90% of women with disabilities and 86% of men with disabilities were the victims of interpersonal violence during their lives.² A recent study found that almost one-third of children and teenagers with disabilities were victims of emotional and physical abuse, 20% experienced neglect, and 10% suffered from sexual abuse.³ In Missouri, research found that there were 701 reports of verbal, sexual, or physical abuse and neglect against people with disabilities in state operated or contracted facilities from January 2019-April 2021.⁴ Abuse and neglect of people with disabilities has only increased due to the COVID-19 pandemic.⁵

Even worse, up to 98% of violence against people with disabilities is not reported or investigated.⁶ People with disabilities are often reluctant to report being victimized due to fears of not being believed,⁷ being retaliated against,⁸ or of agencies like Adult Protective Services institutionalizing them or putting them in guardianship.⁹ Barriers to reporting and investigating abuse and neglect also include inaccessible reporting mechanisms¹⁰ and lack of or incomplete reporting by providers.¹¹ In Missouri, research found that abuse and neglect of people with disabilities is underreported and that there are not adequate safeguards to ensure that abuse and neglect is adequately reported and properly investigated.¹²

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, and statewide complaint reporting system should be developed and implemented, such as the process outlined 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,¹³ 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

- ¹ e.g., Nixon, M., Thomas, S. D., Daffern, M., & Ogloff, J. R. (2017). Estimating the risk of crime and victimisation in people with intellectual disability: a data-linkage study. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 52(5), 617-626.
- ² Lund, E. M. (2020). Interpersonal violence against people with disabilities: Additional concerns and considerations in the COVID-19 pandemic. *Rehabilitation psychology*, 65(3), 19
- ³ Fang, Z., *et al.* (2022). Global estimates of violence against children with disabilities: an updated systematic review and meta-analysis. *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health* 6(5), 313-32
- ⁴ Skipworth, W. (2021). Missouri fails to adequately protect those with developmental disabilities from abuse, neglect. Columbia Missourian. Available at: https://www.columbiamissourian.com/news/state_news/missouri-fails-to-adequately-protect-those-with-developmental-disabilities-from-abuse-neglect/article_801622c6-b0e2-11eb-b5f1-bb2940fd4ef4.html
- ⁵ Lund, 2020.
- ⁶ Kritz, F. (2022). A report on violence against kids against disabilities is sobering – if not surprising. NPR. Available at: <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2022/04/12/1091679303/a-report-on-violence-against-kids-with-disabilities-is-sobering-if-not-surprisin>
- ⁷ Powers, L. E., *et al.* (2008). End the silence: A survey of abuse against men with disabilities. *Journal of Rehabilitation*, 74, 41–53
- ⁸ Oswald, M. *et al.* (2009). Development of an accessible audio computer-assisted self-interview (A-CASI) to screen for abuse and provide safety strategies for women with disabilities. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 24, 795–818.
- ⁹ Lund, 2020.
- ¹⁰ Oswald, *et al.*, 2009
- ¹¹ Lund, E. M., *et al.* (2015). Developing an internet-based abuse awareness program for men with disabilities. *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin*, 58, 131–145.
- ¹² Skipwith, 2021.
- ¹³ See, e.g., Khemka, I., L. Hickson, and G. Reynolds.(2005). Evaluation of a decision-making curriculum designed to empower women with mental retardation to resist abuse. *American Journal on Mental Retardation* 110:193–204.; Hickson, L., Khemka, I., Golden, H., & Chatzistyli, A. (2015). Randomized controlled trial to evaluate an abuse prevention curriculum for women and men with intellectual and developmental disabilities. *American journal on intellectual and developmental disabilities*, 120(6), 490-503.

This document was developed in partnership and with support from the Missouri Developmental Disabilities Council (PL 106-402) and Jonathan Gerald Martinis, LLC (jgmartinisllc@gmail.com).