

FACT SHEET

Factors that Protect Against Sexual Assault of People with Disability

Strategies to protect people with disability from sexual assault need to work across four domains:

1. Personal
2. Relationships
3. Organisations
4. Society



People are safest when they have multiple strategies that encompass all domains of their lives.

Relationships are safest when they are based in recognition and respect for the person and their autonomy, whether at home, at work or at play.

Organisations are safest when their practices support their clients, their carers and family to participate fully and flourish as persons.

Society is safest when its institutions are inclusive, open, fair, and effectively regulated so that they promote moral equality, autonomy and justice.

Protective personal strategies



Self-esteem and self-respect:

- having a clear sense of what matters to you,
- having firm personal boundaries, and
- being clear about what's not ok.

Communication skills:

- being assertive, and confident to speak up or 'make a scene', and
- using communication devices effectively.

Attitudes:

- challenging oppressive norms and prejudices,
- rejecting degrading jokes and language, and
- trusting your gut if you feel unsafe.

Habits

- careful use of alcohol and drugs,
- optimizing your control of your situation,
- keeping your phone charged and on you, and
- limiting exposure to negative talk and media.

Cognitive skills:

- assessing your feelings and being aware of fear, anxiety or negativity,
- identifying risks to yourself,
- identifying unacceptable attitudes in others,
- being aware of the likelihood and impact of sexual abuse, and
- being able to detect a power imbalance in a relationship.

Protective relationship strategies



- Having friends who are accepting, trustworthy and reliable,
- having role models that inspire and encourage you to do what you most want to do,
- having appropriate and effective levels of parental or carer monitoring,
- having a good relationship with parents and/or siblings,
- having good social supports around you,
- living in a well-functioning extended family or residential setting,
- belonging to an association of like-minded people, and
- being in meaningful employment.

Protective organisational strategies



- Working with contemporary, evidence-based practice,
- using person-centred, trauma-informed approaches,
- having appropriate communication tools available,
- careful recruitment and management processes to embed the right attitudes and knowledge in your practice,
- regular monitoring and assessment of client satisfaction and progress, to ensure a voice for clients' views, detect problems early, and thwart potential for manipulation by unscrupulous employees or volunteers,
- transparent and effective complaints processes,
- building a culture of openness, continuous learning and improvement, and shared decision-making with clients and family,
- regular assessment and reporting of performance, including complaints and compliments,
- training and policies that promote inclusivity, and
- formal and informal collaborative relationships with other organisations involved in clients' care.

Protective societal strategies



- Strong education programs to promote inclusivity and understanding of living with disability,
- strong social programs to address prejudice and stereotyping, including oppressive gender norms,
- regulation of services, associations, employment, industry and education to allow full participation (accessibility) and to prevent discriminatory practices,
- strong health and human services that address fundamental causes of violence and alienation as well as improve health,
- engaging people with disability meaningfully in shaping policy and legislation,
- strong legal sanctions for abuse and discrimination, and
- diversity of inclusive associations including sport, amusement, hobbies, and shared interests.

References

1800Respect resources: <https://www.1800respect.org.au/inclusive-practice/supporting-people-with-disability>

Department of Communities Tasmania, *Disability Services Strategic Plan, 2019-21*.

Department of Health and Human Services, Victoria, 2018. *Dignity, respect and safer services. Victoria's disability abuse prevention strategy*

NDS Zero Tolerance Framework: <https://www.nds.org.au/resources/zero-tolerance>