**Domestic violence, abuse and neglect of disabled people**

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This booklet is about domestic violence, abuse and neglect

of disabled people and what you can do if abuse occurs.

This booklet will:

• Describe domestic violence, abuse and neglect

• Provide a checklist of possible abusive behaviours

• Discuss possible abusers

• Offer suggestions for help and support

This booklet is for:

• Disabled people

• Disabled people’s families and friends

• Support people, including staff working in the domestic and sexual

violence, elder abuse, child protection and disability sectors.

**Disabled people**

Some people have impairments that affect their mobility, senses, moods, health and/or

the way their brain functions.

This can be caused by accident, illness, trauma, a genetic condition, ageing or by birth.

Disabled people are more likely to be abused as children and adults than non-disabled people.

Disabled women who experience violence, abuse or neglect are significantly

disadvantaged – as women, as disabled people and as targets of violence.

**What is domestic violence, abuse and neglect of disabled people?**

Abuse can be from a partner, family member or a support person, carers, staff and others. Both men and women can be targets of violence, however, the majority of victims are women.

Abuse can be unintentional – caused by poor practice or neglect such as forgetting to pick up medication, not providing adequate care, leaving a person alone for long periods of time or not providing meals.

More often it is intentional – doing something to hurt, frighten or upset someone.

**Violence against disabled people**

1 Coercive controlling behavior is behaviour towards a person that is designed to make them feel frightened, powerless, subordinate or dependent. This could be:

Threats and intimidation: e.g. threatening to use physical or sexual violence or to hurt someone in any way, threatening to remove the children from your care.

Controlling what you can talk about, wear or do.

2 Physical violence: e.g. hitting, pushing, hurting, withholding medication

3 Sexual violence: e.g. forced sex (rape), using sexual imagery or

language that is offensive or frightening, any unwanted sexual attention

4 Emotional violence: e.g. intimidation and threats, withholding communication

or mobility aids, using a person’s disability to humiliate or demean them, telling someone bad things about themselves, playing mind games

5 Isolation: e.g. not allowing someone to see their family and friends, preventing

someone seeing a health or other professional, not enabling someone to leave the house

6 Financial abuse: e.g. taking control of someone’s finances, using support and household money for other things, taking someone’s house away from them, taking

control of bank cards and money

7 Spiritual: e.g. demeaning someone’s religious beliefs or preventing someone

from engaging in the spiritual customs of their choice

8 Verbal abuse: e.g. shouting, swearing, calling a person names

Abuse can be lack of care and respect by people close to a disabled person or those responsible for their care and support.

**Check out this quiz.**

**Are you being abused?**

Think of someone in a personal or caring role, for example, your partner, your boyfriend or girlfriend, your friend, your carer, personal assistant or a family member.

**DO THEY:**

YES

NO

Frighten you?

Cause injuries or bruising?

Control what you say or do?

Put you down, make fun of you, or make you feel worthless?

Check up on what you’re doing or where you’re going

Try to stop you from seeing your own friends or family?

Hurt your assistance dog or pet if you don’t do as you are told?

Make you feel that no one will believe you if you say you are unhappy?

Stop you from having any money for yourself, tell you what you can and can’t

spend money on or prevent you having any control over your finances?

**DO THEY:**

YES

NO

Refuse to help with your personal support needs when you ask?

Make you feel afraid to disagree or say ‘no’ to them?

Make you feel afraid to say ‘no’ to sex?

Tell other people you make things up and easily get confused?

Scare you by, for example, smashing things, breaking or removing disability

aids, locking you in, driving dangerously to frighten you?

Pressure, force or trick you into doing sexual things that you don’t want to do?

Insist on always going in to see the doctor or other professionals with you?

Threaten to hurt the children?

Threaten to take your children out of your custody?

Say that you will have no one to help you if you leave the relationship?

Threaten that you will be placed in a residential accommodation service if you

complain or don’t do what you’re told?

Threaten to make things worse for you if you say you will make a complaint –

for example in a rest home or other residential situation?

Threaten to hurt you if you want to end the relationship?

**DO THEY:**

YES

NO

Stalk or harass you?

Deprive you of food or your own possessions?

Move into your house on a temporary basis, and then refuse to leave?

Play mind games with you so you no longer know what’s real and what’s not?

Not give you medication or over medicate?

Not give you food when you’re hungry?

Forced you to have an abortion or be sterilised?

Humiliate you in front of others?

Tell you how to behave and/or what to wear?

Tell you what you can and can’t say in front of other people?

Withhold your communication or mobility aids?

Refuse to use communication methods that you are comfortable with?

Make you doubt yourself?

Have your children heard or seen these things or been hurt themselves?

If you have answered ‘YES’ to any of these you need to get help from a domestic violence helpline or service. See the contacts in the back of this booklet.

**People who may abuse you**

Anyone who hurts you, humiliates you, harms you, neglects you – or does any of

the things on the previous pages – may be abusing you.

In your family, this could be your husband, wife, brothers or sisters, parents, aunties,

uncles, grandparents, in laws, boyfriend, girlfriend, flatmates or anyone else in your

whanau.

In addition to this, disabled people may rely on a variety of people to provide them with

assistance such as family and friends, paid caregivers, personal assistants and staff from

agencies that disabled people use or where people live.

People who are not covered by the Domestic Violence Act, but could still abuse you are,

for example: your home help, taxi driver, medical personnel such as nurses, doctors

and therapists, care givers, interpreters, teachers, social workers, counsellors, police,

lawyers and the range of staff in hospitals and other institutions.

No matter who they are, it’s abuse. Tell someone.

Some common excuses for abuse are:

• It was an accident

• It was your fault - you made me do it

• You made it up

• It’s caregiver stress

Sometimes abusers are particularly caring afterwards.

No matter what excuse, violence, abuse and neglect is not your fault.

There is no excuse for abuse.

**There are people who can help you**

Talk to someone you trust about what is happening in your life. If you don’t have

a trusted person, or want to talk privately, contact a service listed at the end of this

booklet.

Talking about what is happening to you is the first step towards improving your

situation.

Note down what is happening to you and keep it in a safe place where the abusive

person won’t find it. This may mean leaving it with someone like your doctor.

This information will help you if you ever need to get a Protection Order (a legal order

that states that the abuser cannot assault or abuse you) or contact the police. It can also

help you see the pattern of events in your life that add up to abuse.

You deserve to be treated with respect.

**Can this be happening to me?**

It can be difficult to believe you are being abused because:

• the person hurting you doesn’t always act this way - sometimes they are loving

and kind

• you love the person who abuses you and you don’t want them to get into trouble

• you depend on the person who abuses you and you are scared of what life will be like

without them

If you often feel afraid of upsetting this person, and you change what you do to make

sure they don’t get angry with you or hurt you, it is a sign of abuse.

Remember, if you are being abused, it’s not your fault.

Just because someone has treated you badly, it doesn’t mean you are in the wrong.

The person who is abusing you is the one who has done the wrong thing. You are not

to blame for the abuse.

It’s your right to feel safe and to live a life free from fear.

**It’s often hard for people to recognise and leave an abusive situation**

Some reasons that people may not acknowledge or try to escape abuse include:

• Fear of abuse increasing and/or becoming more damaging

• Fear of harm to children or others

• Wanting to hold the family together

• Fear of poverty

• Nowhere to go – lack of support

• Lack of self esteem

• Fear of surviving on a benefit

• Social isolation

For disabled people there are added barriers such as:

• Fear of losing a caregiver

• Fear of being institutionalised

• Being unable to communicate without help or technological aids

• Being unable to access support in mainstream ways

• Lack of access to transport

• No alternative accessible housing

A major barrier to getting help and support to safely leave an abusive relationship is

lack of awareness. People don’t believe that violence, abuse and neglect happens to

disabled people.

It is the role of helping agencies to identify the barriers to change and help people

overcome them.

People stay in abusive relationships for many reasons. This does not mean they like the abuse.

It means they have no options – or limited options. It is hard for some people to leave.

**How can I increase my safety?**

When abuse is happening

> Ring 111 and ask for police.

Because we’re all different, the suggestions here won’t suit everyone. Use the ideas that

you like to make a personal safety plan. These ideas won’t help you be immediately

safe. They can help you think about who to talk to and what you can do to be safer in

the future.

If you are planning to leave, know where you are going. If possible have it set up in advance with friends, family or neighbours who may be able to help you and your children.

This could include:

• Arranging transport in advance

• Gathering documents together (birth certificate, passport, IRD number, bank

account details, parenting orders, any vital phone numbers) and leaving them

with a trusted professional or friend in another house

• Leaving clothes, food for your assistance dog, medications, spare house and car

keys and any other essential supplies for you and the children with them

• Keeping a phone with you at all times so you can contact the police (remember

111 is a free call)

• Keeping a list of contact numbers in a safe place (if it’s not safe to keep them

in your phone)

• Organising a pre-arranged code word that you can use with friends or neighbours to

signal that you need the police urgently.

**Ongoing safety**

• Report abuse by a caregiver or support worker to their employer and the police.

• Consider getting a Protection Order if your abuser is a partner, family member

or flatmate.

• Contact your local refuge or domestic violence agency for support.

Delete texts, emails and the history on your browser if you are contacting domestic violence services so the abuser doesn’t see them. Look at any domestic violence site for information about how to do this.

**Contact numbers**

Are you safe right now?

No. Phone 111 and ask for the police. Deaf people text 111.

Yes. I’m safe at the moment

It’s Not OK Family Violence information line

0800 456 450 www.areyouok.org.nz or 2SHINE national help line 0508 744 633

to get information and find your local family violence service

**Other places to find help and information**

Your local Age Concern (during working hours.) Find their number in the Family Services

Directory www.familyservices.govt.nz/directory or in your local phone book and ask for the elder abuse service.

Your local Needs Assessment and Service Coordination Service (NASC) will have a 24 hour crisis response number you can ring if you need emergency respite. Enable NZ can help you to find the number of your local NASC. This is not an option for women with children.

Enable 0800 17 1981 www.enable.co.nz

You need to register for this first. Go to www.police.govt.nz/111-txt

You can find your local Community Law Centre here:

www.communitylaw.org.nz or contact Auckland Disability Law e-mail

info@adl.org.nz, ph 09 257 5140, mobile 0274575140,

www.aucklanddisabilitylaw.org.nz

Deaf, hearing impaired and speech impaired people can use:

NZ Relay TTY: 0800 4 713 713

Voice: 0800 4 715 715,

Fax: 0800 4 329 697

www.nzrelay.co.nz

Visit the Family Services Directory to find services in your area that you can talk

to. You should be able to use the internet in your local library to access this site.

www.familyservices.govt.nz/directory

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contacting domestic violence services. Look at any domestic violence site for

information about how to do this.

Information line 0800 456 450 www.areyouok.org.nz

This booklet is available to order through the resources section on www.areyouok.org.nz

Refer to our Easy Read: What is abuse booklet

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