



Domestic violence and disabled people

Are you afraid or put down by someone close to you? Do you feel your disability is used against you by someone who should be caring? Many disabled people have similar problems.

Abuse can be from a family member or a support person. It can start as not listening or neglecting you, and can escalate into verbal, sexual or physical violence. Both men and women can be targets of violence, but the majority of victims are women.

This booklet is primarily for you. There is information about the risk of violence and what you can do to keep yourself safe. There are emergency numbers at the back of the booklet if you need help urgently.

This booklet is also useful for support people, including staff working in the wider family violence and disability fields. This is essential information that can help you be open to hearing about and responding to abuse. If you are well informed about domestic violence, you can give those being treated badly a sense of hope. Your help will be vital.



Disability is complex and multi-dimensional

Someone's experience of disability may be obvious or hidden, serious or mild, singular or multiple, stable or degenerative, constant or intermittent.

Disability can be caused by accident, illness, trauma, a genetic condition, aging or by birth.

It can affect a person's mobility, senses, moods and the way their brain functions.

Women who experience disability and violence are significantly disadvantaged – as women, as people who experience disability, and as targets of violence.

Stigma and Discrimination

Stigma happens when a certain group is given negative labels that separate them from others. This can lead to stereotyping, discrimination and lower status.

Many people with disabilities are stigmatised. This can make it even harder to seek or receive help and makes it even more important that you are listened to and believed. If you talk to someone who does not believe you, keep trying.

Some things people say about disabilities are:

- Invisible disability is usually made up or exaggerated
- If a person can't do something, they can't do anything
- You are your disability – 'a schizophrenic', a 'Downs Syndrome'
- People who help are 'heroic'; people who receive help are 'needy'

What is family violence?

Family violence can be physical – punching, slapping, pushing or pulling your hair. But it can also be mental, emotional, sexual, financial or spiritual. It's lack of care and respect by people close to you or those responsible for your care.

How people who experience disability can be affected by family violence -

- threats to hurt your children or take them away from you
- mind games and put downs
- withholding food or medication or overmedicating
- keeping you short of money, making financial decisions for you or misusing your money
- making you do sexual things that make you feel uncomfortable
- never letting you be alone with a health practitioner or other helping professional
- forcing you to have an abortion or be sterilised
- humiliating you in front of other people
- checking up on where you are all the time
- controlling your behaviour and relationships with others

Abuse can be intentional – doing something to hurt, frighten or upset you – or it can be caused by neglect such as forgetting to pick up medication, not providing adequate care, leaving you alone for long periods of time or not providing meals.

Common excuses for abuse are:

- It was an accident
- It was your fault - you made me do it
- Saying you made it up.

Sometimes they are particularly caring afterwards.

If you feel scared of your partner, family member, caregiver or flat mate, help is available.

See the back page of this booklet for phone numbers to ring.

Who could be abusing you?

People who experience disability may rely on a variety of people to provide them with assistance. Some of these people are family and friends; others are paid caregivers and staff from agencies that people who experience disability use.

Family violence is abuse of one person by another in a domestic relationship and under New Zealand law, it is child abuse when children witness or hear violence between adults.

The domestic violence act defines a domestic relationship as

- a spouse or partner
- a family member
- someone that you ordinarily share a household with
- a close personal relationship

There does not need to be a sexual relationship.

In your family this could be your husband, wife, brothers and sisters, parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents, in laws, boyfriends and other people living in the same household, for example in a flat or institutional setting.

People who are not covered by the Domestic Violence Act, but could still abuse you are: your home help, taxi driver, medical personnel such as nurses, doctors and therapists, care givers, interpreters, teachers, social workers, counsellors and the range of staff in hospitals and other institutions.

No matter who they are, it's abuse.

Abusers have power over the person they abuse

This could be because they are:

- in a position of authority
- the primary care giver
- stronger
- more able to communicate
- some one you love and don't want to hurt

None of these things make abuse OK

Emotional abuse



**“If you want it
- crawl for it.”**

Check out this quiz. Are you being abused?

If you want, th

Does someone in a personal or caring role, for example your partner, your boyfriend or girlfriend, your friend, your carer, or a family member sometimes:

YES NO

- Cause injuries or bruising?
- Control what you say or do?
- Often put you down, make fun of you, or make you feel worthless?
- Always 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 service animal 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?
- Refuse to help with your personal support needs when you ask?.....
- Make you feel afraid to disagree or say 'no' to them?.....
- 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?

is quiz can be pulled out of the booklet.

	YES	NO
• Pressure, force or trick you into doing sexual things that you don't want to do?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Insist on always going in to see the doctor with you?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Threaten to hurt the children?.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Threaten to take your children out of your custody?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Say that you will have no one to help you if you leave the relationship?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Threaten that you will be placed in an residential accommodation service if you complain or don't do what you're told?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• 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?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Threaten to hurt you if you say you want to end the relationship?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Stalk or harass you when you do end the relationship?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Deprive you of food or your own possessions?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Move into your house on a temporary basis, and then refuse to leave?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Have your children heard or seen these things or been hurt themselves?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you have answered 'yes' to any of these you need to get help from a domestic violence service



Who can I talk to?

Talk to a person who believes that abuse can occur and believes you. Find a person who respects you, who can pick up on your body language when you find it hard to communicate, who will take time to listen to you, who will be careful with your information, and who will respect your decisions.

It feels hard to ask for help

There are many reasons why people find it difficult to talk about abuse.

- Fear of abuse increasing and/or becoming more damaging
- Fear of harm to children or others
- Wanting to hold the family together
- Afraid of poverty
- Nowhere to go – lack of support
- Lack of self esteem

For people who experience disability 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
- social isolation
- lack of access to transport.



A major barrier is lack of awareness. People don't believe that abuse happens to disabled people.

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 or 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, 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 abuser 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.

Getting help

Talk to someone you trust about how you are feeling.

Keep a log. Abuse doesn't happen all the time. It can be a pattern of subtle actions that wear you down and make you fearful.

Abuse thrives in secrecy. Telling someone is the first step to getting help.



How can I increase my safety?

Because we're all different, the suggestions here won't suit everyone. Use the ideas that you like to make a personal safety plan.

When abuse is happening:

- Ring 111 and ask for police.
- Leave if you can – know the easiest escape routes. If you are not able to, you may be able to move to a window and attract someone's attention.
- Move to an area in your house that has an escape route. Avoid kitchens and workshops that contain sharp implements.
- If you 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.
- Depending on your situation, all you may be able to do is calm the abuser down as best you can, and plan ahead to move to a safe place when the incident has passed.



Planning ahead for safety:

Trust your own judgment. You have the right to respect and to be safe

Make a safety plan to use when violence or abuse is happening. This could include:

- Arrange transport in advance
- Gather documents together (birth certificate, passport, IRD number, bank account details, parenting orders, any vital phone numbers) and leave them with a trusted friend in another house.
- Leave clothes, food for your service animal, medications, spare house and car keys and any other essential supplies with them
- Keep a phone with you at all times so you can contact the police (remember dialling 111 is a free call). If possible, put 111 on speed dial.
- Organise a prearranged code word that you can use with friends or neighbours to signal that you need the police urgently.
- Erase any evidence of sensitive emails or conversations over TTY to prevent your partner/abuser reading them.
- Delete texts, emails and the history on your browser. Look at any domestic violence site for information about how to do this.

Ongoing safety



- Once you are in a safe place there are other things you can do:
- 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.
 - Keep a list of contact numbers in a safe place.
 - Vary your routines as much as you can.
 - Contact your local refuge or domestic violence agency for support.
 - Install caller ID.

Contact numbers

Are you safe right now?

No.

Ring 111 and ask for the police

Yes I'm safe at the moment

Ph: **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 below or in your local phone book and ask for the elder abuse service.

Your local Needs Assessment and Service Coordination Service (NASC) will have 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. Enable 0800 17 1981 www.enable.co.nz

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: 027 457 5140, www.aucklanddisabilitylaw.org.nz

Deaf, hearing impaired and speech impaired people can use: NZ Relay 0800 4 711 711
(for non emergency calls only) Further user information - 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





Thank you to the following organisations and researchers for information. Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria (Australia), 2008. Ph. (03) 9486-9866. Email: dvrvc@dvrvc.org.au. www.dvrvc.org.au. DAWN Ontario - DisAbled Women's Network Ontario Box 1138 North Bay, ON P1B 8K4 Email: dawnontario@sympatico.ca <http://dawn.thot.net> Healy L, Howe K, Humphreys C, Jennings C, Julian F 2009, Building the evidence: a report on the status of policy and practice in responding to violence against women with disabilities in Victoria. Victorian Women with Disabilities Network Advocacy Information Service, Melbourne. Thanks to DVD Auckland, DCAV, WAVES Trust, Mental Health Foundation, Shine

 **Mental Health Foundation
of New Zealand**
www.mentalhealth.org.nz



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shine*
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