



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Disabled Persons Protection Commission

300 Granite Street, Suite 404, Braintree, MA 02184

Hotline: (800) 426-9009 (V/TTY)

Phone: (617) 727-6465 • (888) 822-0350 V/TTY • FAX: (617) 727-6469

‘What To Do’ and ‘What Not To Do’ When Abuse is Suspected

Receiving information about the details of allegations of abuse and neglect can be a very disturbing experience for provider staffs and others, both personally and professionally. A number of feelings may be evoked. They can range from anger, disgust, confusion, disillusionment and fear, to total disbelief. The staff person may be a friend of the caregiver/alleged abuser and be reluctant to report the allegations. It is, therefore, important that staff persons entrusted with this information make every effort to respond in a calm, objective and professional manner. Any suspicions of abuse or neglect must be reported immediately, regardless of the personal feelings of knowledgeable staff. Included here are some suggested guidelines for staff to follow when faced with allegations of a crime, abuse and neglect. Remember to **Protect, Report and Preserve**. Victims most often disclose to someone they trust.

What to DO when abuse is suspected...

- **Do** stay calm and remain non-judgmental. Put your own feelings aside and try not to communicate shock, disgust, embarrassment, or disbelief.
- **Do** be supportive. Stay close to the alleged victim immediately after the disclosure to provide some sense of physical security.
- **Do** assure the individual that he/she did the right thing by telling you about the allegations. Never tell the alleged victim that you do not believe her/him.
- **Do** ensure the individual’s safety. Ensure the alleged abuser(s) does not have access to the alleged victim.
- **Do** explain the requirement to immediately report to DPPC and to your supervisor (assuming the supervisor is not part of the complaint).
- **Do** assure the alleged victim that someone will stand by her/him in the process of getting help.
- **Do** seek privacy, if possible, so the individual is protected from disclosing in public.
- **Do** listen closely if the victim wants to talk, but do not ask questions beyond what is necessary to protect the victim and preserve evidence.
- **Do** gather essential information, by asking:
 - **What happened?** Only enough to establish that abuse or a crime has occurred.
 - **Where did it happen?** Important to know for notifying the authorities, securing the scene and protecting evidence.
 - **When did it happen?** If within 120 hours of sexual assault, go to an emergency room for a sexual assault exam, preferably a Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) designated hospital (Attachment F).
 - **Who is the alleged abuser?** If appropriate, ask obvious questions of the alleged abuser about what happened such as why he/she is two hours late arriving back from an appointment with the individual.

- **Do** gather and document basic information on the alleged victim and alleged abuser, as reported.
- **Do**, when possible, collect relevant logs, schedules, correspondence, etc.
- **Do** prevent loss or destruction of known evidence.
- **Do** contain & control the situation.
- **Do** ensure allegations are not repeated to others.
- **Do** control contact with the alleged abuser/suspect. Contact should be limited to one representative of the program.
- **Do** file an Abuse Report by calling **DPPC 24 Hour Hotline at 1-800-426-9009 V/TTY.**
- **Do call 911 in an emergency.**

When abuse is suspected DO NOT...

- **Do not** agree to keep the information secret.
- **Do not** conduct an investigation. Remember that it is not up to you to investigate or elaborate on the alleged victim's story. Your job is to keep the victim safe and to report the allegations.
- **Do not** bathe the victim of an alleged sexual assault or rape.
- **Do not** change the clothes of an alleged victim of a sexual assault or rape.
- **Do not** wash the bed linens or clothing of an alleged victim of a sexual assault or rape.
- **Do not** clean the location of an alleged sexual assault or rape.
- **Do not** re-interview the individual.
- **Do not** interpret or edit the information.
- **Do not** interrogate the alleged abuser/suspect.
- **Do not** involve other persons.
- **Do not** interview other individuals or staff.
- **Do not** go looking for evidence.
- **Do not** touch physical evidence.

In an Emergency, Call 911

**Report abuse and neglect to the DPPC Hotline
1-800-426-9009 V/TTY**