

This is the fourth in a series of postings regarding preventing and reducing abuse, neglect and/or exploitation of individuals with intellectual disability. The information presented in the postings is part of DDS' involvement in the IMPACT/Ability Project, a program of Project Triangle funded through a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

This posting focuses on the issue of sexual abuse and contains information regarding how to recognize, prevent and respond to it. The information is accompanied by a personal story as told by a self-advocate.

Our thanks to The Arc which provided much of the factual information included in this posting.

POSTING #4- May, 2013

What is sexual abuse?

Sexual abuse may be a single incident or pattern of sexually coercive or invasive behavior and/or violation of someone's body or private areas. It can range from inappropriate touching to rape. It can include any unwanted sexual contact or attention achieved by force, threats, bribes, manipulation, pressure, tricks or violence. It can include fondling, exhibitionism, oral sex, exposure to sexual materials, as well as rape, attempted rape and sexual harassment.

Who is vulnerable?

While anyone can be a victim of sexual abuse, people with intellectual disability are sexually victimized more often than others. Women are sexually assaulted more often when compared to men whether they have a disability or not, but researchers have found that men with disabilities are four times as likely to become a victim of sexual abuse compared to men without disabilities.

Who might be an abuser?

As is the case with all types of abuse, abusers are often those who are known and trusted by the victim. They may include family members, acquaintances, residential care staff, transportation providers and personal care attendants.

How can sexual abuse be prevented?

Preventing sexual abuse involves a number of different strategies. First of all, we must all recognize the magnitude of the issue and be vigilant in recognizing and reporting it. This includes both self-advocates, family members, friends as well as service providers.

Educating individuals so that they will feel empowered to report abuse when it occurs is a critical component of the process. Support through classes on sexual violence can assist individuals to protect themselves and respond to potentially harmful situations. In addition, providing sex education and relationship building skills can assist individuals with intellectual disability to learn how to develop and support safe relationships.

Service providers and other advocates must take disclosures of sexual abuse by an individual with a disability very seriously. As with all other types of abuse, service providers and others to whom an individual may disclose, need to listen non-judgmentally, provide support and take information disclosed seriously. Mandated reporters must assure that alleged instances of sexual abuse are reported to DPPC, Telephone number is **1-800-426-9009**. DPPC will determine whether the situation should be referred to law enforcement authorities for prosecution of alleged offenders.

What to do if you suspect a person with a disability has been raped

There are very specific actions which should be taken if you suspect or have been informed by an individual that a rape has occurred. These include:

- Making sure the individual is safe
- Reassuring the individual that the abuse is not his/her fault
- Making sure that the individual does not shower
- Collecting all of the clothing that the individual was wearing at the time of the alleged incident
- Bagging all of the clothing in a paper bag
- Taking the individual to the Emergency Room
- Making sure that they are examined and interviewed by a SANE nurse

What is a SANE nurse:

Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANEs) are specially trained and certified professionals skilled in performing quality forensic medical-legal examinations. SANE nurses will document the account of the assault, perform necessary medical exams, testing and treatment, then collect crucial, time sensitive evidence. Should a case go to trial, the SANE nurses are available to testify. Experience has shown that conviction rates are much higher when a SANE nurse has been involved.

Only some hospitals have SANE nurses. A list of SANE hospitals is included below. Do your best to go to a SANE hospital. The Northeast has only one SANE Hospital, so consideration should be given to accessing Boston Area Hospitals if necessary. Contact with SANE nurses is typically done through the Emergency Room. Make sure one is requested when you get there. They are available by beeper and respond within 40-60 minutes to the designated SANE site.

The link to the SANE web-site and hospitals that have SANE nurses on call, is <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/departments/dph/programs/community-health/dvip/violence/sane/designated-sties/>

Massachusetts SANE Hospitals Listing

Designated *Boston / Metrowest* Area SANE Sites:

- *Beth Israel*
- *Boston Medical Center*

- *Brigham & Women's Hospital*
- *Cambridge Hospital*
- *Children's Hospital*
- *Massachusetts General Hospital*
- *Newton-Wellesley Hospital*

Designated Northeastern SANE Site:

- *Lawrence General Hospital*

Designated Southeastern SANE Sites:

- *Brockton Hospital*
- *Charlton Memorial Hospital*
- *Jordan Hospital*
- *Morton Medical Center*
- *St. Luke's Hospital*
- *Tobey Hospital*

Designated Cape/Islands SANE sites:

- *Cape Cod Hospital*
- *Falmouth Hospital*
- *Nantucket Cottage Hospital*

Designated Central SANE Sites:

- *Harrington Memorial Hospital*
- *Milford Regional Medical Center*
- *UMass Memorial Hospital*
- *UMass University Hospital*
- *Worcester Medical Center*

Designated Western SANE Sites:

- *Baystate Medical Center*
- *Cooley Dickinson Hospital*
- *Mercy Medical Center*
- *UMass Amherst University Health Services*
- *Wing Memorial Hospital*

Personal Story as told by Patty Quatieri

I was living at my mother and father home at that time. Then I was going to the movies with my ex- boyfriend, but he decided he wanted to go to this guy friend house for a dance he was having. Then I got raped and I knew the guy. Then I went home. That night about a couple hours later the Arlington police called and asked my mother if anything happened to your daughter. Then my mother asked me if anything happened to me. I couldn't talk about it so I went bathroom to lock myself in. My sister got me out of the bathroom and my mother took me to the Arlington police station. Then I talked to the investigator about the rape. It took me a few hours at the police station. I was getting tired and couldn't talk any more. I went to the hospital. I was getting depressed because of the rape and other things. The hospital staff were very helpful with my depression. The hospital staff listened to me and it was helpful to talk to them. I was so angry with what happened to me, it took me a long time to figure out how to get better. Then after that I went to group home from the hospital. I got therapy to help me to get my life back.

I would say that individuals should speak up when you are sexual abused and it will help you for a long time. Don't wait to tell someone. They will help you get the right help, for example: Therapy, group therapy with people who went through the same experiences.