

# Tips on what to do when an individual with a disability discloses abuse

## Disability Services ASAP (A Safety Awareness Program)

1. Validate the individual's feelings by saying that the abuse and/or neglect is not her/his fault, that she/he did the right thing by telling you about what happened, and that you are proud of her/his courage and trust in you.
2. Let the individual know that you believe her/him.
3. Allow the individual to tell you what happened and help her/him identify her/his feelings. Remember that telling someone about a painful experience may be frightening to anybody, including an individual with a disability. Individuals with disabilities may test the waters by telling the mildest part of their victimization first. Others may tell their story only once.
4. Write down the date, time, place, and events mentioned by the individual. Write down the individual and suspected perpetrator's identification information such as name, age, disability (if known), address, telephone number and relation to each other. Write down facts that caused you to become suspicious of abuse and/or neglect.
5. Remain calm, be open, use caution, and be aware of own personal beliefs or discriminations.
6. Tell the individual that you will do your best to get help as soon as possible. Talk to them about what to expect, and that you are obligated under the law to report suspected abuse to Child Protective Services (CPS), Adult Protective Services (APS) or other investigative authority (as determined by state legislature). Inform that a worker from the agency may want to talk with the individual too. If the individual is an adult, inform that they have the right to refuse APS services. Do not make promises that are out of your control (i.e., "This will never happen again.")
7. If the individual with a disability and/or other people are in immediate danger, call 911. If an adult, encourage the individual to seek medical attention to ensure that there are no injuries (internal or external) and/or for proper treatment. If a child, seek medical attention to ensure that there are no injuries or for medical treatment.
8. To assist with protection of the individual, follow your state's reporting procedures for suspected abuse, neglect, and/or exploitation of a child, adult with a disability or older adult. In Texas, the CPS/APS hotline number is 800-252-5400. If an adult, give the individual a choice to have you call APS with them present, have them self-report with you present or to self-report by themselves. If you work for an agency, make sure you document the report and inform your supervisor. One needs only a suspicion to report abuse, not evidence. It is the investigators' job to determine if the disability meets the ADA definition and if the individual needs protective services. In most states, it is a prosecutable offense if you have cause to believe that the physical, mental health or welfare of a child or an adult with a disability has been or may be further adversely affected by abuse or neglect and you knowingly fail to report. If you have concerns about the individual's safety, call CPS/APS with the details of the situation and suggest a safe place for the agency to meet with the individual.



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