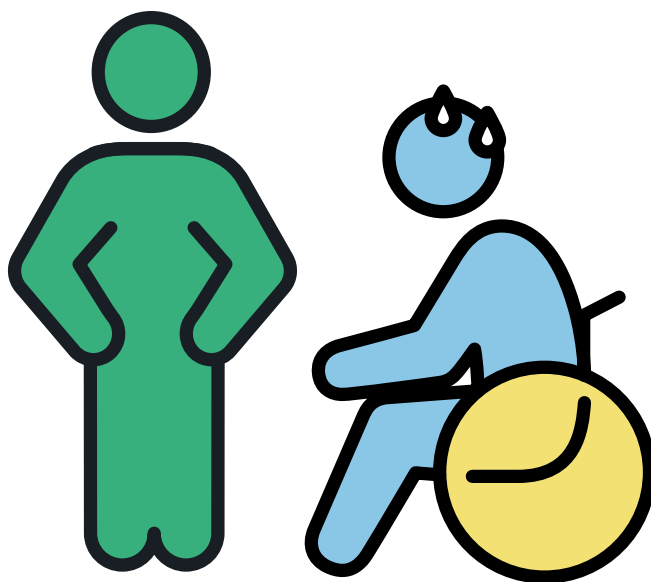


Protecting Yourself from Abuse



This information sheet is about knowing what your rights are, what abuse is, when abuse is more likely to happen, and what to do if you have been abused.

Content Warning: This information sheet talks about abuse, which might be upsetting for some people. Please take care while reading.

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sieccan
Sex Information & Education Council of Canada
Conseil d'information & d'éducation sexuelles du Canada

Know your rights

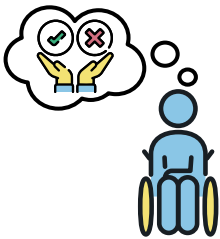
Disabled people are more likely than non-disabled people to be abused. This is not because there is something wrong with disabled people. This is because many people in society do not see and treat disabled people like they should be treated.

Know your rights, including your sexual rights. This will help you recognize when someone is doing something to you that is not okay.

Here are some of your rights listed in the United Nations' *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*:

You have the right to:

- Have your basic needs met.
- Be as healthy as you can possibly be.
- Equality, equity, and to not experience discrimination.
- Make decisions about your life.
- Access necessary information to make informed decisions about your life.
- Access necessary education and services.
- Work.
- Be able to express your opinion freely.
- Be able to fully participate in community life.
- Not experience barriers to accessibility.
- Have access to necessary mobility aids and assistive technology.
- Have access to the supports you need to be able to fully participate in the community.
- Not experience exploitation, abuse, or violence.
- Have privacy.



Sexual rights are human rights, and this includes the right to:



Make decisions about your sexual life, including decisions about being sexually active, using birth control, and having children.



Access necessary sexual health information to make informed decisions about your sexual health.



Access necessary sexual health education and services.



Define your own sexuality and identity.



Express your sexuality.



Choose your sexual partners.



Have safe and pleasurable sexual experiences.



Not experience sexual violence.

Sexual rights are human rights, and this includes the right to:



Experience and express your sexuality and have positive sexual experiences.



Marry and have children if you want to.



Have privacy.

The right to privacy.



Disabled people have the right to privacy, regardless of whether they live on their own, with others, or in a care home.



This means that caregivers need to ask permission:




- To enter your personal space
- Access or share personal information about you
- See or touch your body.



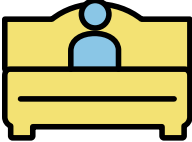



For more information on your rights, check out the guide [“The United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities: What does it mean for you?”](#).

Know what abuse is

Abuse is a behaviour that tries to scare, isolate, or control another person. There are different kinds of abuse. Knowing what abuse is will help you recognize if you are being mistreated.

Types of abuse	Examples
 <p>Physical</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hitting• Choking• Physically preventing someone from seeing their friends or family• Purposely hurting someone when transferring them onto a wheelchair
 <p>Psychological/ Emotional</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Making jokes about a person's disability• Threatening to take away someone's mobility aid (for example, a walker)• Controlling what another person can do• Accusing someone of something they did not do• Threatening to breakup with someone if they do not do what the other person wants them to do• Mistreating someone and then complimenting the person later and telling them how much they are loved. This is sometimes called "love bombing"• Making someone feel like they did something wrong when they did not. This is sometimes called "gaslighting"• Telling a disabled person that they should feel lucky to be in a relationship
 <p>Financial</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stealing someone's money• Controlling how another person can spend their money• Spending another person's money without their permission

Types of abuse	Examples
<p>Sexual</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forcing someone to do sexual things that they do not consent to (for more information on consent, check out SIECCAN's “Communicating Consent: Information Sheet”) • Touching someone inappropriately when helping them with personal care • Removing a condom during sexual intercourse without the other person knowing or giving permission (i.e., “stealthing”)
<p>Neglect</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not giving someone food or clean clothes • Not giving someone the medication they need • Not taking someone to their medical appointments
<p>Cyber</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online bullying • Taking advantage of someone on social media • Spreading fake information about someone on social media
<p>Denial of services and supports</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not giving someone the personal care they need • Not allowing a person to access the mobility aids they need
<p>Destroying someone's things</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Destroying someone's mobility aid • Destroying someone's home or car

Sexual violence

One type of abuse is sexual violence. Sexual violence is any unwanted sexual behaviour or words. It includes a person forcing or pressuring another person to do something sexual that they do not want to do or that they did not consent to. It also includes a person saying something sexual to another person that makes the other person uncomfortable.

Some examples of sexual violence include:



Sexual assault:

Sexual assault includes any unwanted sexual activity or any kind of sexual touch or behaviour that is done to someone by force or without their consent.

One type of sexual assault is when a person is forced to have penis-vagina sex, penis-anal sex, or oral sex.



Sexual harassment:

Unwanted sexual behaviours like sexual comments, jokes, whistling, and other kinds of sexual acts that make another person feel unsafe or uncomfortable.



Sexual exploitation:

When a person in a position of power uses their power to get another person to do sexual things with them.

This can include making threats to force the person to do sexual things with them or telling someone that they will be rewarded if they do sexual things with them.

Check out [Communicating Consent: Information Sheet](#) for more information about who can give consent and consent to sexual activity.



In what kind of situations is abuse more likely to happen?

Disabled people are most often abused by people they know. This can be a partner, a family member, a service provider, and/or a care provider.

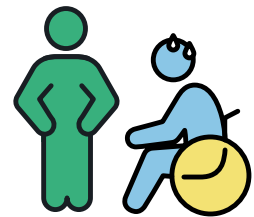
When this happens, it can be difficult for disabled people to leave an abusive situation because they might depend on these people for different things like:



- Emotional support
- Personal care support
- Financial support.

Disabled people might be afraid to lose the support that these people provide and it can be difficult to find new support.

Abusers might take advantage of the fact that disabled people depend on them because they know it will be difficult for disabled people to leave them.



How to know if you are being abused?

Sometimes people who are abused do not know they are being abused. For example:



Some abusive behaviours are more obvious than others. For example: it is usually easier to tell that someone who physically hurts you is abusing you than when someone is manipulating you.



When you are being abused by a parent or a family member, it can be difficult to know what behaviours are abusive. If the parent/family member has been abusing you your whole life, you might start to think that the behaviour is acceptable.



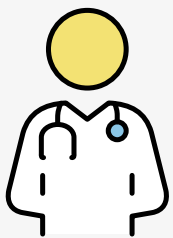
When you are being abused by someone who is helping you with personal care, it might be hard to know when they are touching you in inappropriate ways.



An abusive partner might not always be abusive. They might even be really nice to you sometimes. When this happens, you might not be sure if that person is abusive.



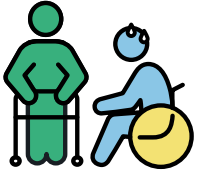
Sometimes abusive people have had past experiences that hurt them, which lead them to take out their pain on the people around them. When this happens, you might feel bad or be empathetic to this person. Remember that even if someone is hurting, you do not deserve to be mistreated.



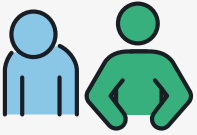
Sometimes a person might not realize their actions are harmful. **However, it is never the fault of the person who is abused.** It is up to that person to deal with their pain and they do not have the right to hurt you.

If you think you may have engaged in harmful actions, you should stop immediately and consider seeking help from a health care provider or therapist.

Here are some ways to tell that you might be experiencing abuse:



You are scared to share your feelings with someone because they often put you down or they threaten you.



When you communicate your needs to another person, the person makes fun of your ideas or feelings and ignores your opinion.



You are scared to disagree with someone because when you do, they often get angry and violent with you.



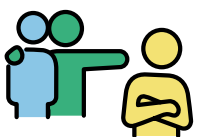
You want to hang out with other people, but someone is physically stopping you from spending time with other people, or making you feel bad for wanting to spend time with other people.



You do not feel comfortable being around someone because you do not know when they might get angry and yell at you.



You have told your partner many times that you do not want to do certain sexual things, but they keep telling you that you will like it and pressure you to do it anyways.



Every time your partner sees you talk to other people they get upset and say that you are flirting with other people and ask you to stop talking to other people.

Here are some ways to tell that you might be experiencing abuse:



You tell your care provider that you do not want them to help you with something, but they keep doing it anyways.



You tell your care provider that you need them to do something differently, but they tell you that you have to either accept the way they do things or they will stop caring for you.



You tell your care provider your needs and they laugh at you or make fun of you.



You tell your care provider that they are hurting you and they say you are just being sensitive.

What to do if you have been abused

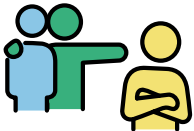
Asking for help can be hard when you have been abused.



The abuser might make you feel like you deserve to be abused.



You might be afraid to lose the support you are receiving from your abuser.



You might be afraid that other people will not believe you when you tell them that you are being abused.

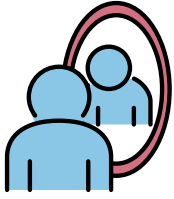


You might be afraid of what the abuser will do to you if they find out you have told someone else.



You might even worry about getting the abuser in trouble.

Here are a few things to remember:



It is not your fault that you were abused.



It is your right to not be abused.



You deserve to live without fear.



You deserve to be respected in all of your relationships.



You have the right to make decisions about your life.

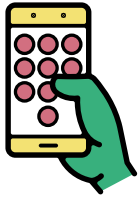


It is not your fault if the abuser gets in trouble for what they have done - it is their fault.



There are people in your life and in your community who care about you and who will help you.

Here are some things you can do if you have been abused or are being abused:

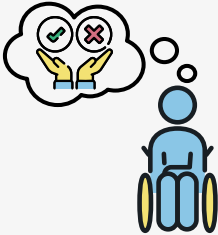


If you are in immediate danger, call the police (9-1-1).

If you are able to dial the number, but cannot communicate, just stay on the line (do not hang up).

If you are able to communicate, tell the person:

- Your name
- Where you are
- That you are being attacked
- That you are afraid to get hurt or afraid for your life
- Where the attacker is and if they have a weapon.



If you are not in immediate danger, think about what you want to do. Do you want to, or do you think you can, leave the abusive situation?



If you want to leave the abusive situation, you should tell an adult that you trust about what is happening.

You can choose to report the abuser to the police or not. If you want to report the abuser to the police, it can be helpful to have an adult you trust with you.

Here are some things you can do if you have been abused or are being abused:



If you do not want to, or do not feel like you can, leave the abusive situation, protect yourself. Come up with a plan for what to do if you are in immediate danger.



Here are some things you can do to plan ahead:

- Find a safe place you can go to if there is an emergency and have a way of getting there.
- It can be helpful to talk to someone you trust before an emergency happens and ask them to help you if there is an emergency.
- Look for a shelter that is accessible before an emergency happens. Check out [ShelterSafe's map](#) that includes a search feature for accessible services and supports.
- There are also shelters that serve certain groups, such as women and children or transgender and gender diverse people.
- If you can, arrange for accessible transportation ahead of time.
- Take pictures of all of your IDs and important documents and save the pictures on your phone where you find them easily.
- Pack an emergency bag with all of your important documents and things you need if you have to leave your home in a rush.
- Talk to a lawyer. You can type "free legal advice" + your city to see if you can find a lawyer you can talk to for free. For example: search for "free legal advice Winnipeg."
- If you think your cellphone or other devices are being tracked by your abuser, go to the library or a community health centre to use the internet. You can also clear your browsing history, change your passwords, disable location tracking apps, or do a factory reset on your devices.



Here are some things you can do if you have been abused or are being abused:

Here are some helplines that you can call or text for help or advice:

Kids Help Phone: Available 24 hours a day for anyone in Canada between the ages of 5 and 29.

- Call: 1-800-668-6868
- Text: 686868

Kids Help Phone also has a chat on their website: <https://kidshelpphone.ca/> (Please note the chat is not 24/7).



The Redwood: Available 24 hours a day for women and their children, trans, and gender-diverse individuals experiencing abuse.

- Call: 416-533-8538
- Text: 647-370-8300
- TTY: 416-533-3736

The **Ending Violence Association of Canada** has a list of sexual assault centres, crisis lines, and support services for each province and territory on their website: <https://endingviolencecanada.org/sexual-assault-centres-crisis-lines-and-support-services/>



You can also find a therapist for more long-term support.

No one deserves to be abused. You do not deserve to be treated poorly because of your disability. You are not a problem or a burden; you have the right to be treated with love and care.