

# STOP IT

## BEFORE IT STARTS

keeping people safe and free from abuse



WE  
LIFE WITHOUT BARRIERS  
VE

# WHAT IS ABUSE?

Abuse occurs when someone's human rights are violated by another person. It happens when someone deliberately hurts, harms or exploits a person living with disability. Or it can happen unintentionally – maybe because it's the way something has 'always' been done.

This booklet has been created for staff at Life Without Barriers. It is about our commitment to champion opportunity for all and to ensure that all people with disability are safe and free from abuse.

**WE  
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At Life Without Barriers we all share a responsibility to do everything we can to prevent all forms of abuse towards people with disability. We need to stop it before it starts.



# DID YOU KNOW?

The 4.3 million Australians living with disability are twice as likely to experience abuse than people without a disability. Women, children, and people who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander are even more vulnerable to abuse.

What's even more alarming is that this abuse is often committed by trusted people, like a family member, support worker, partner or a co-resident in supported accommodation.

## HOW DO WE STOP ABUSE BEFORE IT STARTS?



By supporting people with disability in ways that protect their safety and wellbeing, and empowering them to exercise choice and control in the supports and services they receive.



By speaking up and reporting something you believe is not right and by ensuring we deliver services for people free from abuse, neglect, violence and harm.



By surrounding ourselves with a team that shares our values – a team that's respectful, courageous, responsive, imaginative and focuses on building relationships.

# OUR VALUES



## WE BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

**We** are people people. Relationships come first. Listening helps us understand.



## WE ARE IMAGINATIVE

**We** are imaginative in our thinking and open to new ideas and ways of doing things.



## WE ARE RESPECTFUL

**We** are respectful and caring in our dealings. We see the big picture but never lose sight of detail. We welcome diversity.



## WE ARE RESPONSIVE

**We** are responsive to needs, determined to get things done and do them well.



## WE ARE COURAGEOUS

**We** are courageous in our convictions. We stand up for what we believe in.

# SIGNS OF ABUSE

Sadly, there will always be people who want to harm or exploit people who are vulnerable. So it's important you know what to do if you think a person you support is experiencing abuse.

## YOU MAY NOTICE

- **physical injuries** such as bruising, bite or pressure marks
- **emotional signs** such as anxiety, depression or aggression that's out of character
- **behavioural signs** like changes in sleeping, eating or exercise habits or being fearful of a particular person
- **material signs** like being frequently hungry or unwashed or having an unexplained lack of money



“Abuse is never ok. If something is not right you need to speak up.”

# IF YOU THINK SOMEONE IS AT RISK



## LISTEN

Find a private place to talk and give the person your full attention. Be a listener not an investigator.



## REPORT

Report the incident to your manager or email [tellsomeone@lwb.org.au](mailto:tellsomeone@lwb.org.au). Then create a written report on i-Sight.



## CHECK

Check the incident is being managed in a way that meets our duty of care and mandatory reporting requirements.

## WHO ELSE CAN I SPEAK TO?

If for any reason you are uncomfortable reporting the incident to your manager, you can:



Report the incident to the next line manager (or someone else at Life Without Barriers that you are comfortable talking to)



Email [tellsomeone@lwb.org.au](mailto:tellsomeone@lwb.org.au)



Provide anonymous feedback through the LWB website



Follow the guidelines in the LWB Whistle Blower National Procedure



Report the incident to the National Disability Abuse and Neglect Hotline on 1800 880 052 or email [hotline@workfocus.com](mailto:hotline@workfocus.com)

# WHAT IS PHYSICAL ABUSE?

Physical abuse occurs when a person uses, or threatens to use physical force against a person with disability to hurt or harm them.

## WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

If someone you support is suffering physical abuse you may notice injuries such as bruising, bite or pressure marks. Or they may start to act in ways that are out of character. They could be:

- fearful of a particular person
- irritable or easily upset
- anxious or aggressive
- depressed or overly drowsy
- showing changes in sleeping or eating habits
- maintaining a rigid posture and avoiding contact
- showing changes in their behaviour or daily routine

## WHAT BEHAVIOUR IS NEVER ACCEPTABLE?

- hitting, kicking, shaking, biting, pulling hair
- roughly handling a person during physical support
- force-feeding
- exposing someone to extreme temperatures
- inappropriate use of medication
- not calling a doctor for a medical condition
- leaving someone alone when they need assistance
- not assisting a person to change position frequently to prevent stiffness and bedsores

“I feel safe when I can consent to physical contact before it is provided.”

“I feel empowered when I am free to be whoever I am. When I am listened to, understood and my privacy is respected.”



# WHAT IS EMOTIONAL ABUSE?

Emotional abuse happens when someone uses words or actions to upset, intimidate, threaten, harass or insult a person with disability.

## WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

If someone you support is suffering from emotional abuse, they may start to act in ways that are out of character. They could be:

- agitated or anxious
- quiet or withdrawn
- manipulative
- aggressive, scared, confused
- crying or unable to sleep
- self-harming
- avoiding specific places
- avoiding or clinging to specific people
- not wanting to talk about specific places or people
- eating more or less than usual

## WHAT BEHAVIOUR IS NEVER ACCEPTABLE?

- manipulation
- bullying and intimidation
- humiliation and teasing
- threats to hurt a person
- threats to abandon someone
- verbal aggression
- calling a person names
- ignoring or telling a person they are worthless
- not supporting a person to use their preferred communication method

“I feel safe when I am asked how I feel and encouraged to express my feelings.”

# WHAT IS SEXUAL ABUSE?

Sexual abuse is when someone involves a person living with disability in any sexual activity without their informed consent.

## WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

If someone you support is suffering sexual abuse, you may notice some physical or emotional signs including:

- bruising, bleeding or pain in the genital areas, thighs, breasts or upper arms
- difficulty walking or sitting
- pregnancy
- anxiety or depression
- poor sleep or concentration
- withdrawal from relationships
- fear of carers offering help with dressing, bathing, etc.
- going to bed fully dressed
- reluctance to be alone with a person that is known to them

## WHAT BEHAVIOUR IS NEVER ACCEPTABLE?

- any sexual acts between a staff member and a person they support
- making unwanted sexual comments or jokes
- humiliating or trying to control a person's sexuality
- inappropriate staring
- indecent exposure
- making someone watch sexual acts or sexual media
- grooming
- touching in a sexual manner without consent
- forcing a person into sexual acts
- using a person's vulnerability for self gain

“I feel empowered when I am making choices about the sorts of relationships I want.”



“I want to make choices about how and when I spend my money. I want to be involved in the community and explore my work options.”

# WHAT IS FINANCIAL ABUSE?

Financial abuse involves the improper or illegal use of money, property or possessions belonging to a person with disability.

## WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

If someone you support is suffering financial abuse or exploitation, you may notice:

- they do not have access to personal funds
- an unexplained lack of money
- unaccounted for changes in spending patterns
- unexplained withdrawals from accounts
- failure of staff to provide receipts
- receipts indicating unusual purchases
- the person managing finances does not have the legal authority to do so

## WHAT BEHAVIOUR IS NEVER ACCEPTABLE?

- stealing or using money without permission
- withholding someone's money from them
- keeping the change from purchases
- signing people up to contracts they don't understand
- misusing legal guardianship
- signing for someone without permission
- using a person's vulnerability for self gain
- living in a person's home without paying
- selling someone's possessions

# WHAT IS A PATTERN OF ABUSE?

Behaviour towards a person with disability that may not seem like abuse when it happens once. But when this behaviour is repeated it forms a pattern of abuse.

## WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

A pattern of abuse can relate to repeated physical, sexual, emotional or financial abuse. If someone you support is suffering from a pattern of abuse, they may start to act in ways that are out of character. They could be:

- fearful of a particular person
- irritable, anxious or upset
- showing changes in their behaviour or daily routine
- not wanting to talk about specific places or people

## WHAT COULD A PATTERN OF ABUSE LOOK LIKE?

Shouting at or criticising a person on a single occasion may not seem like abuse. But repetitive shouting and criticism makes it a pattern of emotional abuse.

Walking into the bedroom of person with disability without knocking or asking on a single occasion may not constitute abuse. But when a staff member repeats this behaviour with several people with disability it becomes a pattern of emotional abuse.

# WHAT IS NEGLECT?

Neglect is the failure to provide for a person's basic needs including food, drink, shelter, clothing and medical needs.

## WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

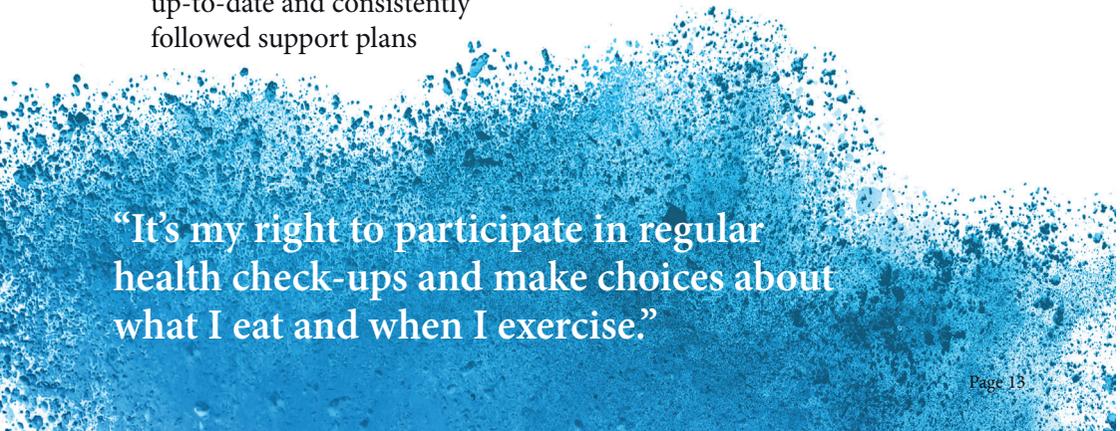
If someone you support is suffering neglect you may notice they are:

- often hungry or unwashed
- only in contact with people who support them
- bored or lonely and have no variation in their routine
- losing skills, including communication skills
- frustrated or agitated
- aggressive toward others
- trying to leave or escape
- not meeting their goals
- not supported with up-to-date and consistently followed support plans

## WHAT BEHAVIOUR IS NEVER ACCEPTABLE?

Failure to provide:

- a safe environment
- supervision for long periods of time when there is a high risk of harm or injury
- clean clothing
- appropriate health care or medical treatment
- adequate nutrition or personal hygiene
- social interaction and engagement



“It’s my right to participate in regular health check-ups and make choices about what I eat and when I exercise.”

# RESTRICTIVE PRACTICE & ABUSE

Restrictive Practices are used to restrict the rights or movement of a person with disability to manage behaviour that is causing harm.

A Restrictive Practice can only be used when it has been approved to protect the safety of a person with disability or others. All other unauthorised Restrictive Practice use is considered abuse.

## WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

If someone you support has been subjected to the unauthorised use of a Restrictive Practice you may notice they are:

- fearful of a particular person
- overly compliant
- irritable or easily upset
- anxious or aggressive
- depressed or overly drowsy
- showing changes in sleeping or eating habits
- maintaining a rigid posture and avoiding contact
- showing changes in their behaviour or daily routine

## WHAT BEHAVIOUR IS NEVER ACCEPTABLE?

The unauthorised use of:

- seclusion
- chemical restraint
- mechanical restraint
- physical restraint
- environmental constraint

[To find out more about Restrictive Practice authorisation in your area contact your Life Without Barriers Quality Business Partner.](#)

# WHAT IS DISCRIMINATION?

Discrimination occurs when a person is treated less favourably than another person because of their race, gender, age, sexuality, disability, culture or religion.

## WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

If someone you support is suffering discrimination you may notice they are:

- depressed or anxious
- suffering low self-esteem
- withdrawn and isolated
- angry and frustrated
- not meeting their goals
- denied basic rights to healthcare, education and employment
- denied options to choose and access services
- not supported to exercise choice and control

## WHAT BEHAVIOUR IS NEVER ACCEPTABLE?

- unequal treatment
- deliberate exclusion because of personal characteristics
- bullying and harassment
- inappropriate use of language
- offensive jokes, derogatory remarks and calling people names
- not supporting a person to use their preferred communication method
- not allowing people to follow their religious or cultural beliefs
- denying people choice about their own sexuality



“I want to explore my interests, try different things and express my opinion.”



“I feel good when I am encouraged to be as independent as possible.”

# AT LIFE WITHOUT BARRIERS WE ALL SHARE THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR KEEPING PEOPLE SAFE AND FREE FROM ABUSE

For more information, tools and resources, visit the Stop It Before It Starts intranet page or speak with your manager.

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Stop It Before It Starts Booklet  
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