



# Health and Welfare Alert

## Abuse Awareness

Today, people with developmental disabilities have more opportunities to be involved in their communities, experiencing new situations and interacting with a wider range of people. Unfortunately, with increased opportunities also comes increased risks. Some people may be more vulnerable to predatory behaviors, like assault or sexual abuse.

Direct support professionals are often trusted supports for the people they provide services to and often are the first to recognize signs that abuse has occurred.

Signs of physical abuse may be subtle, like not wanting to talk to anyone, or may be more visible, like unexplained bruises or broken bones. The person may act aggressively or be less confident than they once were. They may seem scared of certain people or situations and refuse to go places where they know the abuser will be.

### Signs of Abuse

Signs of sexual abuse can include bleeding, soreness, or itching. There may be unexplained, sudden changes in behavior, or someone could have new knowledge about sex. Changes in appetite or sleep habits, resistance to being touched, or sexually transmitted diseases may occur.



### Trauma-Informed Care

Assume that the person has experienced trauma even if you do not know their personal history. Always remember it is "What happened to you?" instead of "What's wrong with you?"

## If abuse is suspected or alleged



1. Get the person any needed medical attention immediately.
2. Report to law enforcement.
3. Report to the county board immediately, within 4 hours.

Like many people in an abusive situation, a person with a disability may not see a situation in which they are being bullied or manipulated as abusive, or may have a hard time communicating about abuse they are experiencing.

Ohio has a robust system to protect vulnerable people. The system requires timely reporting, immediate action, and thorough investigations to be successful.

### FIRST: Contact your county board

## DODD Abuse and Neglect Hotline

Call

**1-866-313-6733**

Report Online

[dodd.ohio.gov/reportabuse](http://dodd.ohio.gov/reportabuse)

## Fast Facts

**1,462** allegations of physical abuse in Ohio in 2019 involving people with disabilities

**348** allegations of sexual abuse in Ohio in 2019 involving people with disabilities

– DODD Incident Tracking System