Signs of Family and Domestic Violence for People with Disability

Family and Domestic Violence (FDV) is an umbrella term that includes physical, financial, emotional, psychological and sexual forms of abuse or violence. Someone may not be ready to disclose that they are experiencing violence or may not be able to identify it themselves, however they may show signs behaviours which indicate something isn't right.

Being aware of the common indicators, as well as the unique ways people with disability can experience violence, may improve your ability to recognise and respond. Whilst no single behaviour is an indicator, some examples include -

Physical, restraint and neglect

Behaviours	Warning Signs / Indicators
• Withholding food or water • Use of medical or physical restraint • Destruction of disability equipment or aids • Misuse of medication, including abuse of prescribing and over/under administration of medication • Withholding medication or support services • Withholding equipment, aids and other items that are important to the person • Locking the person in a room or tying them to a chair or bed • Hitting, pushing, shoving or being rough • Intentionally hurting or injuring • Inappropriate discipline • Failure to provide support when requested or make appropriate referrals • Failure to provide appropriate food, water, shelter, clothing and/or protection	• Visible sign of malnutrition • Side effects of withholding or misuse of medication • Internal or external injuries, including burns and scalds, bite marks, bruising and broken bones • Evidence of non-fatal strangulation • Damaged or disappearing disability aids • Injured pets or assistance animals • Lack of access to required medication • Asking for assistance access items that should be accessible • Signs of internal injuries such as vomiting • Avoidance of particular person or staff member • Changes in behaviour such as refusing to participate in supports • Appearing disorientated, or confused • Frequently hungry or unwashed • Left alone for significant periods of time • Person with disability not attending appointments or activities

Phone: (08) 9300 0340
Email: MSD@pgcnv.org.au

PATRICIA GILES Centre for Non-Violence
MODIFIED SERVICE DELIVERY
GOVERNMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA
Department of Communities

Sexual and reproductive

Behaviours	Warning Signs / Indicators
• Inappropriate touching during care giving • Demands for sexual activity in return for support or care • Non-consensual sexual contact or behaviour, including the use of explicit language • Rape or sexual assault • Control over the person's choice to engage in sex • Control over reproductive processes and contraception • Enforcing secrecy in a sexual relationship • Displays of male privilege or entitlement • Inappropriate sex talk, jokes or sharing of naked photos • Refusing an person's privacy • Enforcing the use of contraception without consent	• Unexplained pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases or incontinence • Frequent urinary tract infections, stomach aches • Difficulty walking, sitting or standing • Injury or trauma, particularly around genitals • Torn, bloody or damaged clothing or bedding • Going to bed fully clothed, night terrors, insomnia or bed wetting • Unexplained gifts or money • Self-harm, including suicide attempts • Sudden change in temperament • Signs of distress after receiving mail or contact by phone / social media • Displaying sexual behaviours of concern • Exhibiting unexpected sexual knowledge

Social and cultural

Behaviours	Warning Signs / Indicators
• Isolation from social supports and networks, community groups and/or events • Denying or withholding access to social media or mail • Preventing the person from engaging in cultural and/or religious practises or celebrations • Forcing the person to engage in cultural and/or religious practises or celebrations • Belittling the person's beliefs, culture, religion, gender or sexual preferences	• Withdrawal from community groups, education or employment • Excessive compliance • Seeking permission for everyday activities • Decrease in interpersonal skills • Withdrawal from personal relationships • Lack of access to culturally appropriate services and supports • Signs of distress or unease when talking about personal preferences or identity • Changes in engagement with cultural or religious practices or celebrations

Emotional and psychological (inc. coercive control)

Behaviours	Warning Signs / Indicators
• Verbal abuse, including name calling, shouting, humiliation and belittling • Ignoring a person • Removing disability aids or other items • Threats to institutionalise or having their children removed • Pressuring or intimidating • Engaging in emotional blackmail, including threating to harm self, people, assistance animals or pets • Threatening to isolate, person from friends, family and social or disability supports • Closely monitoring activity throughout the day • Denying freedom, choice and control • Gaslighting • Turning children or other supports against person • Constant criticism • Reinforcing gender roles • Treating adults like children • Threats to institutionalise • Inappropriate use of power and control • Gender roles - expected to undertake household and childcare duties	• Aggression or frustration • Unexplained mood swings • Low self-esteem, including feelings of worthlessness • Anxiety and depression • Fear of having children removed • Sadness and grief • Disrupted appetite or sleep • Self-harm, including suicide attempts • Increased anxiety after contact with a specific person (perpetrator) • Lack of contact with family and friends • Lack of or change in communication • Disproportionate anxiety or second guessing • Fear of being institutionalised • Normalising the experience / justifying the perpetrator's behaviour

Money / Financial

Behaviours	Warning Signs / Indicators
• Taking control of the person's money / pension • Not allowing the person money for outings or supports • Abusing Power of Attorney role and responsibilities • Stealing personal items such as money, jewellery and other possessions • Not paying bills and risking utilities, tenancy or mortgage • Theft of income • Selling a person's possessions and keeping the income • Refusal to pay for medication or disability items • Refusal to pay for therapy or medical professionals • Forging a signature	• Lack of access to personal funds • Financial debt • Incomplete financial statements or records • Lack of financial autonomy, including inability to access own bank accounts • Unexplained disappearance of personal items and belongings • Unexplained unpaid bills, rent or mortgage • Significant changes to bank balance or Power of Attorney arrangements • Inconsistency between living conditions and funds • Experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness • Lack of access to equipment or services

Institutional and structural

Behaviours	Warning Signs / Indicators
• Lack of personalised support plans to meet the person's needs • Not providing adequate duty of care • Not providing flexibility in supports offered • Not allowed appropriate choice and control • Poor recruitment practices resulting in unskilled support providers	• Not receiving support that meets their needs / lack of options • Unclean or unhygienic environment • Abuse of medication • Overuse or misuse of restrictive practices • Person no longer attends community events or social activities • Lack of skilled staff or inconsistencies in the quality of support provided

References and further reading

Abuse_Disabil _Information.pdf (collegeofdirectsupport.com)

CRARMF-Fact-Sheet-2-Indicators-of-FDV.pdf (www.wa.gov.au)

Domestic, family and sexual violence experienced by people with disability | 1800RESPECT

Hume Moreland NDIS Implementation Workshop #2 – accessible slides (noviolence.org.au)

Indicators and signs - Department of Seniors, Disability Services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships (dsdsatsip.qld.gov.au)

Institutional Abuse Definition & Signs | Ann Craft Trust

SafeguardingPeopleLivingwithDisabilityfromAbuse.pdf (shinesa.org.au)

What is coercive control? | Relationships Australia Victoria (relationshipsvictoria.org.au)