

STRATEGIES TO CONDUCT OUTREACH WITH LOCAL DISABILITY SERVICE AGENCIES:

- Arrange to have a rape crisis counselor go to the disability service agency on a regular basis to meet with people who desire services.
- Work with the disability service provider to establish a way for clients to call the center's hotline confidentially.
- Set up a support group for abuse survivors at the disability service agency.
- Arrange for educators to go the disability agency to talk with clients about issues like healthy relationships or sexual violence.
- Provide the disability service agencies with posters, pamphlets or business cards with rape crisis center hotline information and staff contacts.
- Contact self-advocacy groups and ask if you can be a guest speaker on sexual violence and the right to be free from sexual violence.
- Contact disability organizations and self-advocacy groups when recruiting for new employees and board members.
- When working in the schools, make sure you are also working with students with disabilities. They may be in separate classrooms or buildings.

SURVIVORS WITH COGNITIVE DISABILITIES

In the immediate post-assault period, the survivor needs to be:

- **Reassured** that s/he is not in any trouble and did not do anything wrong. Use kind words and gentle actions. Uses simple instructions that are easy to remember.
- **Allowed time** to process your communication and respond.
- **Assisted** in deciding whom to tell. Anticipatory guidance is helpful. S/he might think everybody knows and might need to be reassured that no one will know unless s/he tells them.
- **Asked** who s/he trusts and who has helped him/her in the past when something bad has happened to him/her.
- **Helped** with getting a significant other to understand the importance of not blaming and providing positive feedback to the survivor as well as with seeking supportive counseling.
- **Assessed** for depression.

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO DONATE, PLEASE CONTACT:

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A brochure especially for Rape Crisis Centers



...healthy relationships
for individuals with
disabilities.



WORKER PREPARATION

Individuals with disabilities have many of the same needs as survivors without disabilities. They need to be believed, supported, and validated and have information about their rights and options.

They need to feel safe and empowered. When responding to a individual with disabilities, the rape crisis worker needs to:

- Acknowledge the limits of the individual's knowledge and experience and strive to increase this.
- View the individual with a disability holistically and provide victim-centered services.
- Inquire respectfully about his/her particular needs.
- Acknowledge and address attitudinal barriers.
- Respond positively and creatively to resolve barriers to service delivery (e.g., transportation, communication).

RESPONDING TO SURVIVORS

Survivors need to know:

- What happened to them is not their fault.
- It is okay to talk about what happened.
- They are not alone.
- Others are here to help.

RECOGNIZE AND REMOVE BARRIERS

Individuals with disabilities often face specific barriers when seeking help:

Credibility-Individuals with disabilities are deemed less credible by most people. By the time the individual connects with the rape crisis center, s/he may have already had some negative experiences with the service system. Make it clear that s/he did the right thing by reaching out for help. Be clear about what you can and cannot do for him/her.

Lack of Information-Individuals with disabilities often have not had much education about sex, their bodies or relationships. They many not have the vocabulary that they need to describe what happened to them. This can make disclosure difficult. They may not even fully understand what happened. They may need confirmation of what happened to them was wrong, that it was something that should not have happened, and that their thoughts and feelings about the situation are normal and understandable.

Transportation-The individual with disabilities may not have a ride to and from the hospital, court or rape crisis center. Explore other options with the individual as possible-taxi, bus, a friend, an ambulance, etc. Ask the disability service agency the survivor frequents if they may provide assistance.

MAKE THE ENVIRONMENT WELCOMING

To make your environment one that feels welcoming for survivors with disabilities, consider the following:

- Is your location easy to find and fully accessible? Is assistance offered and provided in a friendly and accommodating manner?
- Are people with disabilities reflected in the art on the walls, brochures that are available, etc.?
- Are materials written in plain, easy to understand language?
- Do staff use people first language and treat each survivor with respect?
- Are clients given options and choices?
- Are they respected and supported?

COLLABORATION WITH DISABILITY SERVICE AGENCIES

The goal is to make individuals with disabilities and their service providers, family/friends and support workers aware of your services. They need to know:

- That a rape crisis center exists in their local area.
- The services the center provides.
- That services are disability responsive.
- How to collaborate with you to serve individuals with disabilities who experience sexual violence.