

Responding to disclosure



Parents and carers of children with intellectual disability and autism might worry a lot about their child.

They might worry about:

- their child growing up
- how their child will communicate with support people
- whether their child will live out of home
- how their child will be able to tell someone if something is wrong

It can be hard for children to tell people when something is wrong.

If your child is non-verbal, this might be even harder.

It is important for parents to know about abuse and different signs to look for.

It is also important for parents and carers to know what to do if a child tells them about abuse.



What is on this page?

This page will help parents and carers know what abuse looks like and what to do if a child tells you about abuse.

It has information on:

- what is abuse
- what abuse looks like

- what are some signs of abuse
- what to do if someone tells you about abuse
- things you can try when talking about abuse
- who you can talk to about abuse



What is abuse?

Abuse is when

- someone hurts you
- you hurt someone else

Abuse is never OK.



What does abuse look like?

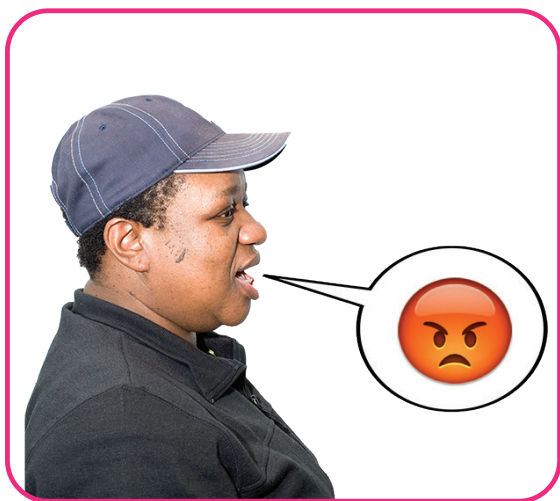
Some abuse is physical. It might look like:

- hitting
- punching
- kicking
- shaking
- biting
- pulling hair
- sexual contact without permission

Abuse can also be things that people say.

It might sound like:

- yelling
- saying hurtful things
- calling people mean names





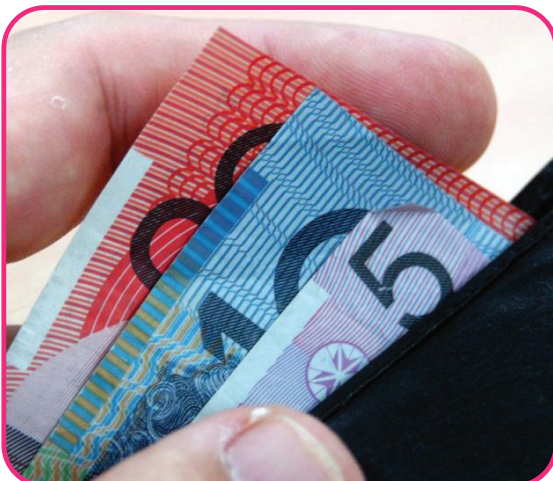
- making threats to hurt you or others

Sometimes you can't see or hear abuse.

This kind of abuse is hard to spot.

It might be:

- taking things like food, hygiene, medication or support away on purpose
- separating people from their friends and family on purpose
- stealing from people
- using someone else's money in a bad way (gambling or using NDIS funds without permission)



You might also know about restrictive practice.

A restrictive practice is something that takes away your rights or freedom without your permission or consent.



A restrictive practice might look like:

- locking someone in a room
- not giving someone privacy
- forcing someone to take medication that they might not need

What are some signs of abuse?

It can be hard to tell if someone is being abused.

They might not feel comfortable telling anyone, or they might not know it is happening.

There are some signs that someone might be going through abuse.



These signs could be:

- injuries like bruising, bite marks or bleeding
- fear of being around certain people
- feeling angry, annoyed, anxious or depressed more often
- eating and sleeping a lot more or a lot less than usual
- sore private body parts
- hurting themselves
- feeling scared or angry during personal care
- saying yes to everything no matter what
- not communicating or socialising as much as before



- being very tired, very hungry or not showering or bathing as much

Signs of abuse can look different for everybody.



It is important to remember that these signs don't always mean someone is being abused.

If you are worried, or changes have happened very quickly, you should always talk to your doctor.

What to do if someone tells you about abuse



Thinking about abuse can be very upsetting.

This is normal.

It's important to know what to do if you think someone is being abused, or if someone tells you that they are experiencing abuse.



Here are some things that are important to do if someone tells you about abuse:

- try to be calm
- tell your child that they have done the right thing telling you
- listen carefully to what your child is telling you
- tell your child that you believe them
- tell your child that you support them
- report what your child has told you as soon as possible
- reassure the child that they have done the right thing by telling you



- if your child is non-verbal, use writing or drawing to help them tell you what is wrong
- use a diary or a safe computer at home to write down what your child has told you.

It is important to write down exactly what happened and what your child has said to help with making a report.



It is important to only write down facts and not feelings.

If you think someone is in immediate danger, call 000 and ask for the Police



It is extremely important that you do not:

- ask your child to give you more details than is necessary
- try to investigate abuse on your own
- confront anybody involved
- ask lots of different questions that might confuse them
- ignore your child



It is also very important to take care of yourself as a parent or carer when talking about abuse.

Talking about abuse can be very stressful and upsetting, so it's important that you are feeling OK to give support to your child.

To learn more about helping yourself to feel OK, go to: [Self-care for parents](#).



Things you can try when talking about abuse:

Here are some things you can try to keep your child safe and help them to communicate with you if something is wrong.

- encourage your child to communicate with you often so that they feel safe telling you things
- get to know your child's teachers, therapists and support people and communicate with them about any changes in your child
- talk about 'surprises' instead of 'secrets':



Surprises make people happy when they find out.

Surprises don't last for very long.

Knowing about surprises doesn't make you feel bad.

Secrets exclude others.



Secrets can cause others to be angry or upset when they find out.

Secrets might last for a long time.

No one should ask your child to keep a secret.

- teach your child about safe people and tricky people.

to learn about safe people, go to:

[identifying safe people](#)



- teach your child about private body parts.

to learn about private body parts, go to: [private body parts](#)

- teach your child about consent.

to learn about consent, go to: [importance of consent](#)



- teach your child to no go tell if someone tries to touch them in a way they don't like, or tries to touch

their private parts, say/sign no and go tell a safe adult.



- look for any change in behaviour and looking out for signs of abuse.

if you notice some changes, make sure you note them down in a safe place.

Who you can talk to about abuse?

If you are worried that a child is at risk of harm or abuse, you can contact the organisation in your state below.



Australian Capital Territory

[Office for Children, Youth and Family Support](#)



New South Wales

[Family and Community Services \(FACS\)](#)



Northern Territory

[Territory Families](#)



Queensland
Government

Queensland

Department of Child Safety



Government
of South Australia

South Australia

Department of Child Protection



Tasmanian
Government

Tasmania

Department of Health and Human
Services



Victoria

Department of Human Services



GOVERNMENT OF
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Western Australia

Department for Child Protection and
Family Support

Resources for you to use

Sex Safe and Fun



<https://www.fpnsw.org.au/factsheets/individuals/disability/sex-safe-and-fun>

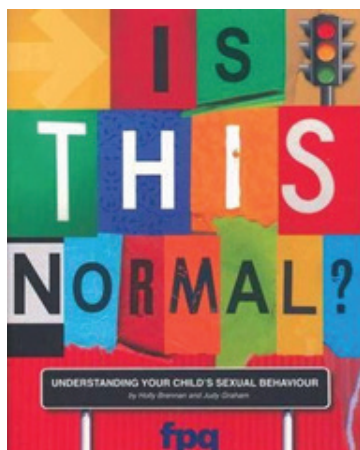
All About Sex: Sexual Assault



<https://www.fpnsw.org.au/factsheets/individuals/disability/all-about-sex>

Is this normal

By Holly Brennan and Judy Graham





Kids Helpline: Responding to disclosures of child abuse

<https://kidshelpline.com.au/parents/issues/responding-disclosures-child-abuse>



What to read next:

- [Consent in relationships](#)
- [Healthy relationships](#)
- [Self-care](#)

For more information go to the Planet Puberty website

www.planetpuberty.org.au