

Stop the Violence Break the Silence Introduction

Stop the Violence, Break the Silence Training Guide and Resource Kit is an abuse/violence prevention and education Training Guide & Resource Kit.

Materials are appropriate for presentation to persons with disabilities, family members, professionals in crisis intervention and disability service, or other relevant fields. It provides the tools to implement an education and/or intervention program for people with disabilities within a domestic violence, sexual assault or disability service agency.

"Stop the Violence, Break the Silence" prepares agencies and individuals to advocate for personal safety education for people with disabilities; assist individuals with disabilities gain self-awareness skills and insights about their personal and caregiver relationship boundaries, needs and responsibilities; and promote equal access to programs and services at domestic violence and sexual assault agencies.

"Stop the Violence, Break the Silence" Values

- Accept zero tolerance of violence and abuse.
- Model social change for equal and inclusive access to services and information.
- Promote healthy and violence-free relationships.
- Respect individual and personal choices.
- Aid in healing from domestic and/or sexual violence.
- Advocate for client-directed and barrier-free services.
- Empower people with disabilities.

"Stop the Violence, Break the Silence" Goal

- Increase knowledge and awareness regarding violence and abuse perpetrated against people with disabilities.
- Enhance physical, programmatic and attitudinal accessibility of domestic violence and sexual assault services for people with all types of disabilities.
- Provide strategies for helping to reduce violence and abuse by providing abuse prevention and personal safety education to people with disabilities.
- Provide strategies for crisis intervention services to people with disabilities.
- Provide resources for additional educational and supplemental materials to teach abuse prevention to people with cognitive, developmental, physical and other disabilities.
- Encourage the development of service linkages between disability service professionals and domestic violence and rape crisis agencies.

The Stop the Violence, Break the Silence Training Guide and Resource Kit exposes the relationship of abuse and violence to disability and works to assist crisis intervention and disability agencies as they provide accessible services to all people. It provides presentation materials for use by domestic violence, sexual assault and disability service professionals, social workers, counselors and other interested professionals. It also provides examples of materials to be used when presenting sexuality education and abuse prevention education to people with developmental or cognitive disabilities.

Individuals with disabilities deserve the right to a life free from violence and abuse. A healthy and fulfilling relationship with a partner or caregiver is based upon respect, honesty, accountability, equality, trust and support. Although many individuals with disabilities experience satisfactory intimate relationships and receive exemplary personal care, many also endure sexual, physical, emotional and financial abuse, neglect or exploitation perpetrated by a

partner, family member or caregiver.

Research shows that individuals with disabilities face increased risks of sexual abuse and family violence compared to persons without disabilities (Sobsey, 1994). There are a variety of reasons for these increased risks. For instance, a person with a physical disability may rely on a partner, spouse or caregiver for help with bathing; preparation for performing sexual acts; preparing, cooking and ingesting food; administering medications; and maintaining medical equipment and/or adaptive devices. The nature of some of these tasks is highly personal and therefore may contribute to the vulnerability of the individual with a disability. The individual may have multiple caregivers (i.e., peers, family members, spouses or partners, paid or unpaid personal care attendants, medical professionals, therapists) involved in day-to-day activities, and this fact may also contribute to being more vulnerable to abuse.

Perpetrators generally perceive individuals with disabilities as easy targets for victimization. In some ways, they are correct. Individuals with physical disabilities may be less able to defend themselves or to escape violent situations. Individuals who have speech impairments may have limited communication abilities that can pose barriers to disclosing abuse and to seeking appropriate help (i.e., when calling a hotline, a person with cerebral palsy may be perceived as being drunk or making a prank call). People with developmental disabilities often go through life without receiving correct information or education about sexuality, abuse prevention and self-protection strategies, or they may not be given any information on ways to develop and maintain a healthy and supportive relationship.

In most acts of domestic violence and sexual assault, the perpetrator exerts his or her power over the victim. With domestic violence, the desire to maintain absolute control in a relationship based upon an unequal distribution of power and control can lead to abuse, violence and even murder. In the case of caregiver abuse, the perpetrator generally focuses the abuse on the individual's perceived limitations relating to the individual's disability or disabilities. Examples of caregiver abuse include, but are not limited to: not performing personal care tasks as instructed or at all; threatening to place the individual in a nursing home or other restrictive institutional facility; stealing money, personal belongings or monthly Supplemental Social Security (SSI) checks; over or under medicating the individual; breaking or hiding adaptive equipment (i.e., battery to power wheelchair, adapted teletype telephone used by people who are Deaf, communication device used by a person with a speech impairment).

There are several reasons why a person who is a victim of abuse, neglect or exploitation cannot or will not disclose the abuse or violence she or he may be experiencing. For example, the individual may rely on the abuser for vital personal care and, by reporting, would risk not getting her or his basic needs met. Also, she or he may not be aware of any community resources available for domestic violence or sexual assault services, or these resources may not be accessible to individuals who need accommodations. Perhaps the individual believes, due to lack of education and experience, that she/he is the only individual who experiences abuse, thus making it a shameful secret.

Institutionalization and society's fear of people who are "different" can also lead to the social isolation of many people with disabilities. This isolation helps to create physical, programmatic and attitudinal barriers to full participation in the community and the vocational and recreational activities available to other members of the community. In addition, individuals who live in institutions face increased vulnerability to abuse because of the reinforced demand for compliant behaviors, the perceived lack of credibility of individuals with disabilities, the social isolation and lack of access to learning environments and the individual's economic, physical and psychological dependence upon others.

Research and program initiatives have shown that education and training efforts that include sexuality awareness and violence and abuse prevention does help to prevent abuse of people with disabilities. Working together, crisis service professionals and disability service providers

can make a difference in the lives of individuals with disabilities.

The Stop the Violence, Break the Silence Training Guide and Resource Kit is based on the training materials of Disability Services ASAP (A Safety Awareness Program) of SafePlace: Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Survival Center in Austin, Texas. Disability Services ASAP (previously known as the Personal Safety Awareness Center) opened in 1996, and is an innovative, award-winning program designed to promote healthy and violence-free relationships for persons with disabilities. Disability Services ASAP serves as a replicable model for those interested in preventing sexual, physical, emotional, and other types of interpersonal abuse faced by many individuals with disabilities. Disability Services ASAP provides education about sexual abuse, domestic violence and caregiver abuse to children and adults with disabilities, family members, as well as group counseling for persons who have experienced sexual abuse/assault, domestic violence and/or abuse by a caregiver. Loved ones may also access counseling. Disability Services ASAP operates a national resource library of curriculum, videos, books, journals, anatomically correct models, etc., that promote abuse prevention/intervention strategies and education, and teach the tenets of healthy relationships to people with disabilities.