

**Why are people with developmental disabilities more at risk?**

- May have a variety of care providers and may be reliant on physical assistance
- Frequently taught to be compliant to request from caregivers or other authority figures
- Often isolated or living institutional/group settings
- Have not typically received appropriate sexuality education which addressed healthy sexual relationships
- May not have been allowed privacy or had the chance to learn about the private areas of the body
- May have limited communication skills, therefore making it harder to resist or disclose abuse
- Often not believed or viewed as credible

STATEWIDE SEXUAL ASSAULT CRISIS  
RESPONSE HOTLINE  
1-800-977-5776

**Arkansas Coalition Against  
Sexual Assault**

200 River Market Avenue, Suite 100  
501-246-3276  
1-866-63-ACASA (22272)  
[www.acasa.us](http://www.acasa.us)

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***Sexual Abuse  
Of  
People  
With  
Developmental  
Disabilities***



## The Issues

- Studies have constantly shown that 65-85% of adults with developmental disabilities been sexually abused. Much of this abuse begins in childhood and continues into adulthood.
- Majority of the abusers are well known to the victim: family members and paid caregivers.
- Perpetrators have little fear of consequences because many cases go both undetected and unreported.

## Sexually abused persons may demonstrate the following behaviors:

- Seems fearful of a particular person
- Resists physical exams
- Having added difficulties in school or social situations
- Sleep disturbances or nightmares
- Depression
- Increased sexual “acting out” behavior
- Regression to childlike behaviors
- New or increased interest in sexual issues

A major obstacle to detecting sexual abuse in this population is the fact that the common symptoms of sexual abuse are often overlooked and attributed to the victim’s disability. Do not dismiss suspicious events or behavior as being part of the disability.



## Symptoms to look for in a living environment:

- Lack of privacy and dignity for the resident
- The expectation of complete compliance as a condition of residence
- High client-to-staff ratio, which limits supervision and opportunities for disclosure
- Staff without a positive attitude towards the residents
- Institutional settings that cluster potentially sexually aggressive and vulnerable individuals together

- Loose standards for “therapeutic restraint”

## How can you help make it safer?

- Support the individual in finding activities that he or she enjoys and which can boost self-esteem
- Make sure a facility carefully screens staff before employment
- Choose a facility that supports regular visits by outside agencies
- Be certain that appropriate sexuality education is taught. Do not assume that it’s not necessary even if it makes you uncomfortable
- Be available to talk in an unrushed manner on a regular basis
- Teach that there are some valid situations for noncompliance
- Provide support for positive, healthy relationships with romantic partners.

***“My Ability is Stronger Than My Disability”***