

Lets Talk about **Sexual Violence** Guide

The **Board** Resource Center
*Making Complex Ideas Simple*SM



Funded by The Special Hope Foundation


The Arc[®]
National Center on Criminal
Justice & Disability NCCJD[®]

To prepare health care professionals and advocates for a conversation with women who have intellectual/developmental disabilities and have experienced sexual violence.

It takes all of us to stop this silent epidemic!



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Preface

This project seeks to address the widespread, and often unrecognized, sexual abuse of women with intellectual/developmental disabilities. About 20% of all women are sexually abused during their lifetimes. However, nearly 68% of women with intellectual/developmental disabilities (referred to in this guide as I/DD) will be abused before they are 18 years of age, and up to 90% will experience these crimes over the course of their lives.

For these compelling reasons, it is critical that health care professionals and their patients talk openly about sexual violence and abuse prevention. This project provides training tools that help create a safe place to have this conversation. With greater awareness of the prevalence, health literacy needs, and effective communication strategies, health care professionals can engage with patients to talk about sexual abuse and what women can do to get help, and report the experience if they so choose.

The Arc's National Center on Criminal Justice and Disability® and the Board Resource Center have missions that emphasize accessibility of information, education, and empowerment for people with I/DD. "Talk About Sexual Violence" aligns with ongoing work by both organizations in sexual assault and abuse prevention.



Kecia Weller and Molly Kennedy



“As self-advocates, we created the public service video *“Abuse of People with Disabilities: A Silent Epidemic”* to encourage people with disabilities to speak up about abuse. It called on all of us to work together to stop cycles of abuse. Our expectation for healthcare providers is that they join our team.



Be compassionate, communicative, and responsive with women like us who come through your door. Assure them you can be trusted to help. We rely on you to help us prevent these crimes.



About Special Hope, NCCJD, BRC

Talk About Sexual Violence was developed by the Board Resource Center and The Arc's National Center on Criminal Justice and Disability, with guidance from an advisory group that included health care providers, social workers, care providers and women with I/DD. The project was funded by the Special Hope Foundation.

Special Hope Foundation (specialhope.org)

The Special Hope Foundation strives to promote the establishment of comprehensive healthcare for adults with I/DD. It funds programs that improve healthcare delivery and are designed to address fundamental and unique needs of individuals with various health care conditions.

The Arc's National Center on Criminal Justice and Disability (thearc.org/NCCJD)

The Arc promotes and protects the human rights of people with I/DD. Funded by the U.S. Department of Justice to create The Arc's National Center on Criminal Justice and Disability® (NCCJD®), it brings together both victim and suspect issues involving people with I/DD. NCCJD is the national focal point for collection and dissemination of resources and serves as a bridge between justice and disability professionals.

Board Resource Center (brcenter.org)

The Board Resource Center works from its founding principle of Making Complex Ideas *Simple*sm to assist organizations and individuals to integrate policies and person-centered services based on inclusion. BRC provides leadership development for organizations and government agencies that advocate for and provide services to underserved community members. It has become a leader in developing adapted multi-media materials aimed at increasing inclusion, personal safety, civic engagement, and access to policy making for at risk populations, especially people with intellectual/developmental disabilities.

Guide Purpose

Building capacity of health care professionals to discuss sexual violence with female patients with I/DD lays the groundwork for preventing abuse and empowering their patients. Health care professionals are in a frontline position to act and prevent abuse. However, many providers have little or no experience talking about victimization with women who have disabilities. In addition, many women with I/DD are unlikely to raise the topic on their own. They may not know what constitutes abuse or how to describe it. To have meaningful conversations, this guide provides approaches to providing patients with safe environments to share their experiences.

Engaging the project's target audiences (e.g., health care providers, persons with disabilities) to gather input on accessibility of language and content was essential to creating customized, effective and easy-to-use materials. Equally important is the ease of availability to resources and tools. With guidance from the project's Advisory Committee, "Talk about Sexual Violence" tools were designed with this audience-centered approach.

Kecia and Molly –

- ▶ "We rely on health care providers as partners to reduce abuse. Please take steps to prevent abuse from continuing."
- ▶ "It's important for health care providers to act. It's the compassionate thing to do, to help another human being."

Training Components

Website (talkaboutsexualabuse.org)

The website page describes the purpose of “Talk About Sexual Violence” and training components available. Project materials are designed for short 15 – 30 minute presentations with two short videos and supplemental resources aimed at health care professionals for online or in-service trainings. The site also provides viewers – service providers, support agencies and persons with disabilities and families – with sexual violence and abuse prevention resources.

“Talk About Sexual Violence” tools enable busy professionals to access materials to learn information at a pace that suits their busy schedules. These user-friendly approaches seek to increase comfort and engagement with the topic, which leads to more effective support for female patients with I/DD who experience sexual violence and abuse.

Videos



“How to Have the Conversation”



“Kecia meets with her Doctor”

Recent studies show videos are an effective way to learn and are easily accessible across many formats including computers, smartphones, and tablets, and especially useful for busy professionals when time is short.

“Talking About Sexual Violence” three-minute training videos provide basic guidance on setting a tone, communicating effectively and supporting a female patient with I/DD who has experienced sexual violence. Health care providers can reduce discomfort, encourage trust, and respond effectively.

The first video describes straightforward measures to take and tips to follow during a routine appointment with a patient. The second is a short vignette demonstrating the use of these approaches.

PowerPoint Slides

A PowerPoint package is available to accompany training presentations. The slides include a short agenda and training guidance. The slides lead audiences through basic steps in setting a welcoming tone, providing assurances that the healthcare provider is there to listen and help during a conversation with open, careful exchanges.

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Charts

AAC includes all forms of communication (other than oral speech) used for expression. People with severe speech or language difficulties rely on AAC to supplement existing speech or replace it altogether.

Training Tips

In order for the victim to tell what happened, the person and the environment must feel safe. In addition to the communication strategies described in the videos, here are some tips:

- ▶ Meet with your patient without the presence of others who may influence her ability to speak freely.
- ▶ Use plain, everyday language that is easy to understand.
- ▶ Ask your patient to share what she is able to about the situation. Let her tell her account of what happened without interruption. Listen actively.
- ▶ Focus on what your patient saw, heard, felt. This will provide better understanding of the experience.
- ▶ Avoid rapid-firing of questions; Ask open-ended questions such as, “Can you tell me more about..?”

- ▶ Do not ask 'why' questions or the person may think you are blaming her for what happened.
- ▶ Use paper, pencil, communication charts with pictures and/or icons, if needed.
- ▶ Thank her for talking with you and remind her that you are there to help.
- ▶ Assist your patient to contact support agencies and/or authorities, if needed.
- ▶ Ask if she feels safe with her care giver (who could be a possible perpetrator).



Final Words from Self-Advocate Advisors

Molly –

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities deserve to live their lives free from abuse. This project focuses on supporting women who experienced sexual abuse and violence. We as individuals with disabilities know all too well that these shocking crimes, as well as financial and psychological abuse, continue at alarming rates. I dealt with intimidation that was used to try to control me. They thought my disability meant I was weak and vulnerable and they could easily manipulate me. I had to realize that and learned to stand up for myself. We must support others to stand up and support them to speak up.

Kecia –

Abuse is often ignored, excused or denied when reported by people with intellectual/developmental disabilities. Many people experience abuse time after time in their life, like me. And victims usually know the person who is the abuser. We all need to be aware of what happens with abuse, who does it, and how to prevent it.

Join the conversation, “let’s talk about sexual violence” and end the silent epidemic of abuse in the world!

We can’t stop it alone!

Acknowledgement

The Arc's National Center on Criminal Justice and Disability® is deeply grateful to the people and organizations that made this project possible. Due to the high rate of sexual victimization among people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, many victims suffer in silence unless someone notices the red flags of sexual violence and begins asking questions.

Thank you to Kecia Weller and Molly Kennedy for their willingness to openly talk about their personal experiences and spend countless hours creating powerful training tools for the medical profession. We also appreciate the Special Hope Foundation who validated the critical need to educate health care professionals about sexual violence of people with disabilities in California and throughout the U.S.

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