



Disability Services ASAP
(A Safety Awareness Program)

Checklist for Persons with Disabilities: What to Take with You When You Leave an Abusive Relationship

IDENTIFICATION

- Driver's license or state I.D. card
- Your and your children's (or other family member's) birth certificates
- Social Security card or award letter
- Proof of disability
- Food stamps/Temporary Assistance for Needy Families card
- Insurance, Medicaid, Medicare and/or clinic card

MONEY

- Money and/or credit cards/ATM card
- Bank books/account information/checkbook
- If applicable, information on stocks (including stock certificates), bonds, and individual retirement account(s), mortgage

LEGAL PAPERS

- Lease/house payment information/deed to the house (even if you do not plan to live there)
- Car registration/car insurance papers
- Health/life insurance papers
- Medical records/doctor's orders
- Children's school records/shot records
- Work permits (green card, VISA)
- Passport
- Divorce and child custody papers
- Protective or Restraining Order

OTHER IMPORTANT DISABILITY-RELATED ITEMS

- Adaptive equipment (wheelchair, shower bench, crutches, communicative devices, etc.)
- Medications/prescriptions/doctor's orders
- Urological supplies
- Service animal and needed supplies for their care
- Names and phone numbers of home health agencies, caseworkers and other disability service providers to assist in coordinating services for you
- Phone numbers of friends or past attendants who might be willing to help with personal care tasks during the transition period and also provide you with some emotional support
- Fixed route bus pass, Mobility ID card or Special Transit ID card
- Medical records

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS

- House/car/office keys
- Small objects to sell
- Jewelry
- Address book
- Pictures of you, evidence of physical abuse, your children, grandchildren, and the abuser
- Children's small, favorite toys
- Toiletries/diapers
- Cellular phone programmed to 9-1-1 (these can often be obtained for free through Adult Protective Services or a local domestic violence program)

*This list is not intended to be all inclusive.
Deciding what items are necessary to take must be individualized to the person's lifestyle and situation.*

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Tips on What to Do If an Individual with a Disability Discloses Abuse

1. Validate the individual's feelings by saying that the abuse and/or neglect is not her/his fault, that she/he did the right thing by telling you about what happened, and that you are proud of her/his courage and trust in you.
2. Let the individual know that you believe her/him.
3. Allow the individual to tell you what happened and help her/him identify her/his feelings. Remember that telling someone about a painful experience may be frightening to anybody, including an individual with a disability. Individuals with disabilities may test the waters by telling the mildest part of their victimization first. Others may tell their story only once.
4. Write down the date, time, place, and events mentioned by the individual. Write down the individual and suspected perpetrator's identification information such as name, age, disability (if known), address, telephone number and relation to each other. Write down facts that caused you to become suspicious of abuse and/or neglect.
5. Remain calm, be open, use caution, and be aware of own personal beliefs or discriminations.
6. Tell the individual that you will do your best to get help as soon as possible. Talk to them about what to expect, and that you are obligated under the law to report suspected abuse to Child Protective Services (CPS), Adult Protective Services (APS) or other investigative authority (as determined by state legislature). Inform that a worker from the agency may want to talk with the individual too. If the individual is an adult, inform that they have the right to refuse APS services. (if this is true in your state) Do not make promises that are out of your control (i.e., "This will never happen again.").
7. If the individual with a disability and/or other people are in immediate danger, call 9-1-1. If an adult, encourage the individual to seek medical attention to ensure that there are no injuries (internal or external) and/or for proper treatment. If a child, seek medical attention to ensure that there are no injuries or for medical treatment.
8. To assist with protection of the individual, follow your state's reporting procedures for suspected abuse, neglect, and/or exploitation of a child, adult with a disability or older adult. In Texas, the CPS/APS hotline number is 800.252.5400. If an adult, give the individual a choice to have you call APS with them present, have them self-report with you present or to self-report by themselves. If you work for an agency, make sure you document the report and inform your supervisor. One needs only a suspicion to report abuse, not evidence. It is the investigators' job to determine if the disability meets the ADA definition and if the individual needs protective services. In most states, it is a prosecutable offense if you have cause to believe that the physical, mental health or welfare of a child or an adult with a disability has been or may be further adversely affected by abuse or neglect and you knowingly fail to report. If you have concerns about the individual's safety, call CPS/APS with the details of the situation and suggest a safe place for the agency to meet with the individual.

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How to Communicate with People with Atypical Speech

ATTITUDES

- Assume that the person with whom you are speaking will be able to understand you, and that you will be able to understand them. The first assumption of many people who have limited experience with those whose speech is atypical is that there will be a problem communicating. Often, this is not the case. Sometimes it depends on what you expect.
- Assume that the person with atypical speech has typical intelligence. Just because a person's articulation is different from what you are accustomed to does not mean that the person has any intellectual difficulty/disability.
- Remember that communication is a partnership. Communicating means that both people are encouraged to express what is on their minds and that both individuals listen and take in what is being said and respond appropriately. Communication between two people is an exercise in turn-taking: each person learns to absorb what is said and then takes a turn being the speaker again. This turn-taking process is usually conducted unconsciously, and is only exposed as a process when one or both individuals have difficulty with their turn. To make this process conscious when first interacting with someone who has atypical speech, remind yourself to speak, wait and listen, and then take your turn again.
- Miscommunication between two people constitutes a communication "breakdown." In a communication breakdown, one person does not understand what the other is saying and the expected ease of the conversation is disrupted. In that moment, both people become aware that there is work to do. The appropriate response to a communication breakdown is an attempt to repair the breach. It is a partnership, so both parties share the work of repairing the communication breakdown. It may be helpful to identify the breakdown out loud to the person and say, "I'm so sorry, but I feel like we're missing each other. Can we start over?"
- Do not speak for someone else even if you are familiar with his or her speech patterns unless you have been asked to do so, or you have an agreement about it. People who are having difficulty understanding may turn to someone they think is easiest to communicate with and literally pass over the person whose speech is difficult to understand. This kind of "speaking for" infantilizes the speaker and it puts a third person into what was intended to be a two-person conversation. It is intrusive. To be a conscious communicator, you may have to say no to someone who is asking you to speak on behalf of a person with atypical speech. They have to do the work themselves. Rather than automatically answering, you might say, "I don't know, ask her."

ACTIONS

- If you do not understand what someone has said, be honest about it. If you pretend to understand but do not, there is a noticeable shift in the equality of the interaction, and it signals a certain level of disconnection. People who have lived many years with atypical speech usually know when someone is pretending to understand, primarily because it changes the nature of the interaction by reducing the intelligibility of the conversation and creating emotional distance. Pretending to understand can result in the other person feeling embarrassed, angry, frustrated and/or alienated.

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How to Communicate with People with Atypical Speech

- Tell the individual you have not understood what has been said. There is no “fault” in these situations, and there is no “right” way to feel about any communication breakdown. The focus needs to be on repairing the breakdown, and the first step is to acknowledge that you did not understand.
- Once you have admitted that you do not understand, wait for the individual to attempt to repair the breakdown. Most people who have atypical speech patterns have years of experience repairing communication breakdowns and they will employ any number of strategies to help you understand. You may not need to do anything more than admit you have not understood.

STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION (in priority order)

- For those situations where effective communication requires more than a simple repetition, you and the person with atypical speech can employ any of the following strategies:
- **Wait:** Communicating with an individual who has difficulty with speech is complicated, so take your time. Decoding speech patterns that your ears are not trained for can take a little time. Listen to the whole sentence or phrase. Wait for a second and try to relax. Let the conversational context help you.
- **Repeat:** Simply repeating the sentence or thought may be enough. There are times, though, when repeating is not going to help because the speaker is not going to be able to change the way a specific word is pronounced. If repeating does not work, move on to another strategy.
- **Rephrase:** Ask the individual to try and express the same thought using various words. Often, the misunderstanding hinges on one or two words in a sentence.
- **Identify which part of the sentence or thought was misunderstood:** If you know most of the phrase or sentence that has been spoken and can identify which part(s) are unclear, you might try repeating back to the individual what you know has been said, and asking him/her to focus on finding a way to understand just the part you did not get. This has two functions: it lets the person with atypical speech know that you are still actively participating in the conversation and that you want to understand, and it also reduces the amount of repair that has to happen.

If the previously-mentioned strategies are not effective, consider the following:

- **Spelling:** Once you have located the word(s) you do not understand, ask the individual to spell for you. It usually just takes the first few letters of the word to clear up the confusion.
- **Writing:** You can ask him or her to write it down, or you can write down what you thought they said, and you can give each other feedback.
- **Guess:** Ask what the topic is and/or ask for a context in which you might better understand or “guess” - this can be really funny! And it can break the tension as long as the person with atypical speech knows that you are trying.

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OTHER ACCOMMODATIONS

- Speech to Speech Relay (STS) is a service mandated by the Federal Communications Commission that enables people with a speech disability to use their own voice, voice prosthesis, or communication device to make a phone call. In an STS call, the speech of one person is relayed to the other by a communication assistant in a three-way call environment. Call 7-1-1 and request “Speech-to-Speech” to place a call or visit www.speechtospreech.org for a list of toll free numbers throughout the United States.
- Assistive or Adaptive Technology: The individual may use assistive or adaptive technology such as a communication board or electronic device with speech output. If this is the case, ask the person which mode of communication he/she prefers to use. Some individuals will prefer to use their own speech. Keep questions and responses short and simple. The person may have to spend more energy using the device to communicate. Ask the person with atypical speech if he/she prefers both parties to communicate in written form. The person may want to read your responses rather than hearing them. Be patient and wait. The person with atypical speech using assistive technology may require several minutes to communicate.
- Keep in mind that augmentative communication devices may be withheld and/or broken by perpetrators in an attempt to silence the individual who relies on them. In addition, some perpetrators may attempt to “speak for” the individual in an attempt to prevent a survivor from speaking out. Other perpetrators may refuse to program augmentative communication devices to further prevent disclosure. When interacting with individuals who may use these types of communication supports, be aware of this dynamic and include it in any safety planning that you may offer. In addition, discuss checking in periodically just to make sure that the communication device is being used to relay the person’s intended message, not that of a perpetrator.

This handout was developed based on input and/or direct experiences of individuals with atypical speech.

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Safety Planning for People with Disabilities

Preparing to Leave an Abusive Situation

A safety plan is a unique strategy to reduce the risks of abuse or violence which may include escaping a dangerous situation. Each person's plan is individualized for her/his situation and may be altered at any time. The following are ideas to consider for women or men with disabilities, but are not in any particular order of importance.

- If you are thinking about leaving, do not let your abuser know of your plans to escape. Be careful not to leave clues regarding your destination (i.e., long distance or cellular phone bills or literature about domestic violence services).
- Change your payee (if you have one) on your SSI/SSDI benefits to someone you trust other than the batterer. You (or a caseworker from a domestic violence, disability service agency or Adult Protective Services) will need to contact the Social Security Administration to change the payee name. Be aware that the abuser may notice when the SSI/SSDI benefits are redirected and this may be dangerous.
- Get a post office box in your own name and hide the key or give it to a trusted friend or relative.
- Open a savings account in your name only and have bank statements sent to a P.O. Box or other address that is not known to the abuser, if possible. Have your benefit checks direct deposited into that account. If possible, try to set aside as much money as you can. If you have joint accounts with your spouse or partner, try to take all of your money out and put it in your own account (if this feels safe to do). It may seem sneaky or it may even be risky for you, but it may mean your survival.
- Think about applying for a credit card in your name only and having statements sent to an address that is not known to the abuser, if possible. If you use a credit card after leaving, make sure that the bill will not be sent to the residence where the abuser lives or has access.
- Plan for assistance with personal care tasks. Prepare to receive this assistance from someone else besides the batterer. Ask several friends, family members or faith community members for help if possible so that one person is not over-taxed.
- If you receive Medicaid/Medicare and are low income and living in Texas, you may be entitled to services from the Texas Health and Human Services/Community Care Programs. Some home health care agencies have rates based on income. Contact a caseworker or an intake worker and let them know about your service needs. If at first she/he does not respond or assist, call again and ask for a status report or for an explanation about why services have not been initiated. If they still do not respond, ask to speak to their supervisor.
- Gather money, extra set of keys, medications, spare adaptive aids or medical supplies, a packed bag with a few changes of clothes for you and your child(ren) and leave those items at the home of a trusted friend or relative.
- Assess your own resources. Figure out if you have people (i.e., friends, family, church or synagogue members, etc.) who would be able to let you stay with them or lend you some money to make the transition.
- Rehearse your escape plan and practice it with your children.
- Make arrangements for your service animals or pets.

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Safety Planning for People with Disabilities Preparing to Leave an Abusive Situation

- Make sure if you drive an adapted vehicle that the adaptations are in good repair and the vehicle itself is in reasonable, working order. Have your vehicle checked often in case the abuser has tampered with it in any way. Never leave your vehicle with less than half a tank of gas. This is so that if you need to leave in a hurry, you have a reasonable amount of gas available.
- If you live in a major metropolitan area, consider applying for special or para transit services. A doctor or caseworker can certify your disability if you have seen them for services before. This may be done by mail. Know the policies and regulations of the para transit system. Para transit services may not be a viable option for leaving an abusive relationship if you have children or a large family & pets. Many cities do not provide emergency para transit rides & some systems mandate that only one or two persons may travel with the person with the disability.
- Be aware of ways in which the abuser may be able to use technology to monitor you and learn of your plans to leave. If the abuser is technologically savvy, you may want to talk to someone specifically trained in safety planning related to technology (e.g., domestic violence program, police/sheriff).
- Call the domestic violence shelter in your area (or the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1.800.799.SAFE; 1.800.787.3224 TTY) to discuss safety planning. Let them know what your needs are and that you have a disability. Inquire about accessibility. Be aware that shelters are often full. More than likely, the shelter is not turning you away because of your disability. Ask to be put on the waiting list and check back with them daily to inquire about their status. Remember, safety planning is very, very important at this stage of the process. Stay in touch with your local hotline. Ask them for help to strategize with safety planning. A person is much more likely to be in extreme danger or killed upon leaving a relationship than at any other time. Consider attending a domestic violence support group if one available in your community.
- Keep the domestic violence or other crisis hotline telephone number with you. Better yet, memorize it! Keep some extra change with you for phone calls or purchase a pay-as-you-talk or prepaid cell phone for emergencies. Most shelter hotlines will take collect calls.
- Obtain information from the Police, Sheriff's Department, or County Attorney's Office about your legal options as well as the process to apply for a protective order.
- Call and talk with other disability related service providers and disability rights organizations listed in the phone book (i.e., support groups, coalitions, independent living centers, etc.) and ask for assistance with locating accessible housing or other support services.
- Call Adult Protective Services (APS) and report the abuse. Let them know if your health and safety are at stake. The telephone number in Texas is 1.800.252.5400 (voice and TTY). They will take self reports. Ask APS what the process will be for investigation and services. Not all APS reports end in a nursing home placement. If you are not willing to tolerate a nursing home placement, then let the social worker know that. There are emergency options other than an institutional setting and APS may be able to set up other temporary emergency services.
- When you leave, consider writing a note to the abuser that says you went to a doctor's appointment or another place that will not make the abuser suspicious. This will give you a head start.

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- If after you leave, you need to telephone anyone who knows the abuser, be careful that your location cannot be traced through caller ID or call return.
- Leaving an abusive relationship is a process for people with disabilities just like it is for people without disabilities. For individuals with disabilities, this process can be longer because of all the logistics. Leaving an abusive relationship is one of the bravest, most frightening experiences a person can go through. Being abused is not your fault and neither is having a disability.
- Only you know your batterer best. Use the steps that make sense for your personal situation. If something does not feel safe and might put you or your children in further danger - don't do it!
- Remember there is hope. There are options. There is a way out.

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Personal Safety Planning for Explosive Incidents

- **THINK AHEAD & PLAN AHEAD** for personal safety, if possible.
- Pay attention to cues that the abuser demonstrates before becoming explosive and/or angry. Watch for those cues, so you can plan ahead before the situation escalates. Trust your instincts.
- Plan to have your caregiver or partner perform personal care tasks when they are in a good mood, if possible, and not violent or angry. Have them do some extra, simple tasks (i.e., extra laundry, organizing personal items) so that these items can be easily accessed in an emergency/crisis situation.
- Try to have your form of mobility available (already be in your wheelchair, have your walker or cane close by).
- Stay close to a phone. If you have a cellular or cordless phone, keep it tucked away at your side, in your wheelchair, in a scooter basket and turn the ringer off so your abuser will not know you have it. Program 9-1-1 and other safety numbers into your telephone if it has this feature. Also, be aware that most cell phones have a global positioning system in which the abuser may be able to locate where you are.
- If an argument seems unavoidable, try to move into a room or area away from potentially dangerous items (i.e., furniture, walls, glass, weapons, etc.) Try to stay near an exit if possible. This is especially important if your partner/caregiver has been violent toward you in the past. It almost always happens again.
- Get out an exit if possible and **YELL OR MAKE SOME LOUD NOISE** (only if it is safe for you to do this!)
- Practice ahead of time how to get out of your home or how to get to the phone to call for help.
- Identify a friend or neighbor ahead of time you can call. Memorize their phone number or keep it in a safe place. Pick a safe time to talk to them ahead of time about the violence. Then ask them to call 9-1-1/police, if they hear a disturbance coming from your house.
- Contact the police when a crisis is not happening. Tell them about your situation. Ask them to send a patrol car to drive by your house a couple of times during an evening or as regularly as possible. Many police will do this on a semi-regular basis if they know you are a person with a disability.
- Figure out a code word or code phrases you can use with your children, family, and friends to alert them to call 9-1-1 if you are in a violent situation.
- Plan ahead for where you will go if you have to leave home (even if you don't think leaving is possible).
- Use your own judgment and trust your feelings and instincts. If the situation is dangerous, consider giving the abuser what they want, in order to calm them down temporarily. You have the right to protect yourself until you are out of danger.

REMEMBER:

YOU DO NOT DESERVE TO BE HIT, THREATENED OR VERBALLY OR SEXUALLY ABUSED!!!
YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE SAFE!

This document is not intended to be all-inclusive, nor do any of the suggestions provided in this document guarantee personal safety. This document is intended to be used as a guide for planning for personal safety.

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