



People with disability face a higher risk of sexual violence due to systemic inequalities, dependence on caregivers, and barriers to communication.

Despite this, disclosure of abuse - especially historic abuse - is often delayed or prevented due to fear, lack of accessible support, and societal attitudes.

Why Early Disclosure Matters

Encouraging and supporting early disclosure, even in cases of historic abuse, can:

✓ **Reduce isolation and shame**

Survivors with disability may feel particularly vulnerable or unheard; disclosure can provide validation and connection.

✓ **Improve access to support services**

Tailored trauma-informed services can assist in recovery, empowerment, and justice pathways.

✓ **Prevent further harm**

Perpetrators often target people with disability due to perceived vulnerability. Early disclosure can protect others.

✓ **Promote systemic change**

Understanding patterns of abuse in disability settings can inform stronger policies, safeguarding, and prevention measures.



How to Support Early Disclosure in the Disability Sector

To create a safer environment for early disclosure, we need:

- **Trauma-informed and disability-aware professionals** – Ongoing specialist training is needed for disability support workers and service providers to respond appropriately to disclosures of sexual violence.
- **Accessible and inclusive reporting pathways** - Services must offer multiple ways to disclose (e.g., Easy Read materials, alternative communication methods, interpreters) to encourage earlier disclosure.
- **Stronger safeguarding measures** – Disability services must have robust policies to prevent, detect, and respond to abuse.
- **Referral pathways** - Clients who disclose sexual violence should be referred to specialist services to follow up.

Barriers to Early Disclosure in the Disability Sector

People with disability face additional challenges when disclosing abuse:

• **Communication barriers**

Survivors with cognitive or communication disabilities may struggle to express their experiences or find accessible ways to disclose.

• **Dependency on caregivers**

Many survivors rely on family members, support workers, or institutions that may dismiss, minimize, or cover up abuse.

• **Fear of consequences**

Some worry that disclosure will lead to loss of autonomy, forced institutionalization, or not being heard, believed or validated.

• **Lack of trauma-informed services**

Many professionals lack training in disability-inclusive, trauma-informed care, making disclosure experiences re-traumatizing or ineffective.

• **Institutional abuse and cover-ups**

Abuse in disability settings (e.g., group homes, schools, workplaces) is often hidden due to power imbalances and systemic failures.



For further resources or training,
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