Access Matters: Why Domestic and Sexual Violence Programs Must Be Prepared to Serve Survivors with Disabilities

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July 14, 2026

Activating Change

Today we will…

- → Explore what we know about domestic and sexual violence in the lives of individuals with disabilities and Deaf people.
- → Discuss implications for your work and the field.



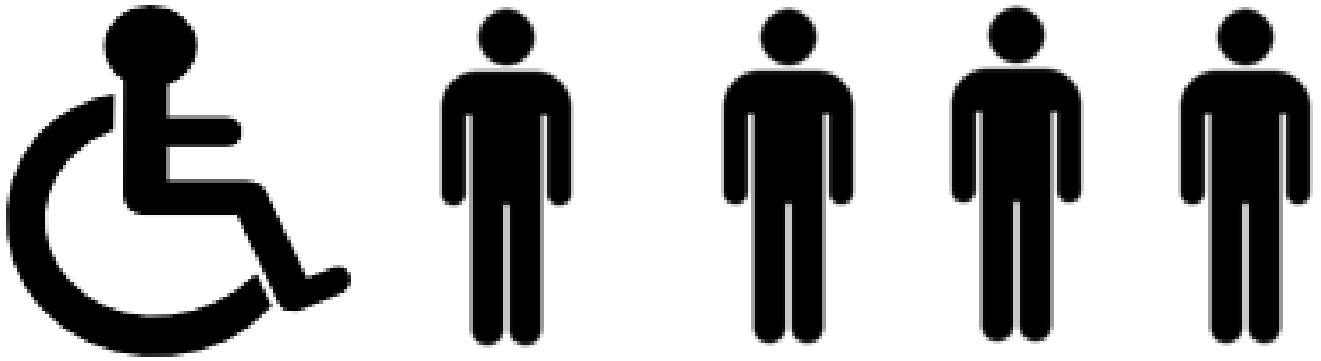


The Basics: Disability

- Overview of Disability
- Key Considerations
- Domestic & Sexual Violence in the Lives of People with Disabilities

Disability is ordinary.

→ **1 in 5** people living in the United States have at least one disability.



Source: U.S. Census

Disability is a broad category.

- → Chronic health conditions
- → Cognitive
- → Developmental
- → Physical
- → Psychiatric
- → Sensory

Nothing About Us Without Us

- Disability rights movement was founded on the principal of participation.
- Emphasizes the active involvement of people with disabilities in planning and implementation of strategies, polices, and practices that impact their lives.



Incidence and Prevalence

About the research…

- → Limited research exists

- → Cannot generalize findings to all people with disabilities

- → Research has documented that some people with disabilities experience increased risk of domestic and sexual violence compared to people without disabilities

What we know…

- Women who have experienced intimate partner violence are more than twice as likely to also report a disability.
- 14% of men with disabilities reported experiencing sexual violence at some point in their lifetime compared to 4% of men without disabilities.
- 49% of people with developmental disabilities were assaulted 10 or more times.
- 20% of Deaf adults have experienced physical abuse by an intimate partner. 15% have experienced forced sex in an intimate partner relationship.

Unique Dynamics

Survivors, in general, often experience…

- → Fear of retaliation and/ or retribution
- → Fear that they will not be believed
- → Embarrassment or shame
- → Don’t know about safe and supportive resources in their community
- → Fear of loss of support system (friends, family, etc.)

Dynamics Unique to People with Disabilities

- → Denial of information about healthy relationships
- → Systematic isolation, exploitation,and marginalization of people with disabilities
- → Lack of confidentiality:
  - → Small, close knit communities
  - → Guardians
  - → Mandatory reporting policies

Dynamics Unique to People with Disabilities (2)

- Some perpetrators use tactics that expressly target people with disabilities and Deaf people
- Fear of institutionalization
- Loss of personal care and other services
- Lack of accessible transportation
- May not know what they experienced is abusive and/or criminal
- May have experienced violence throughout their lives by multiple perpetrators

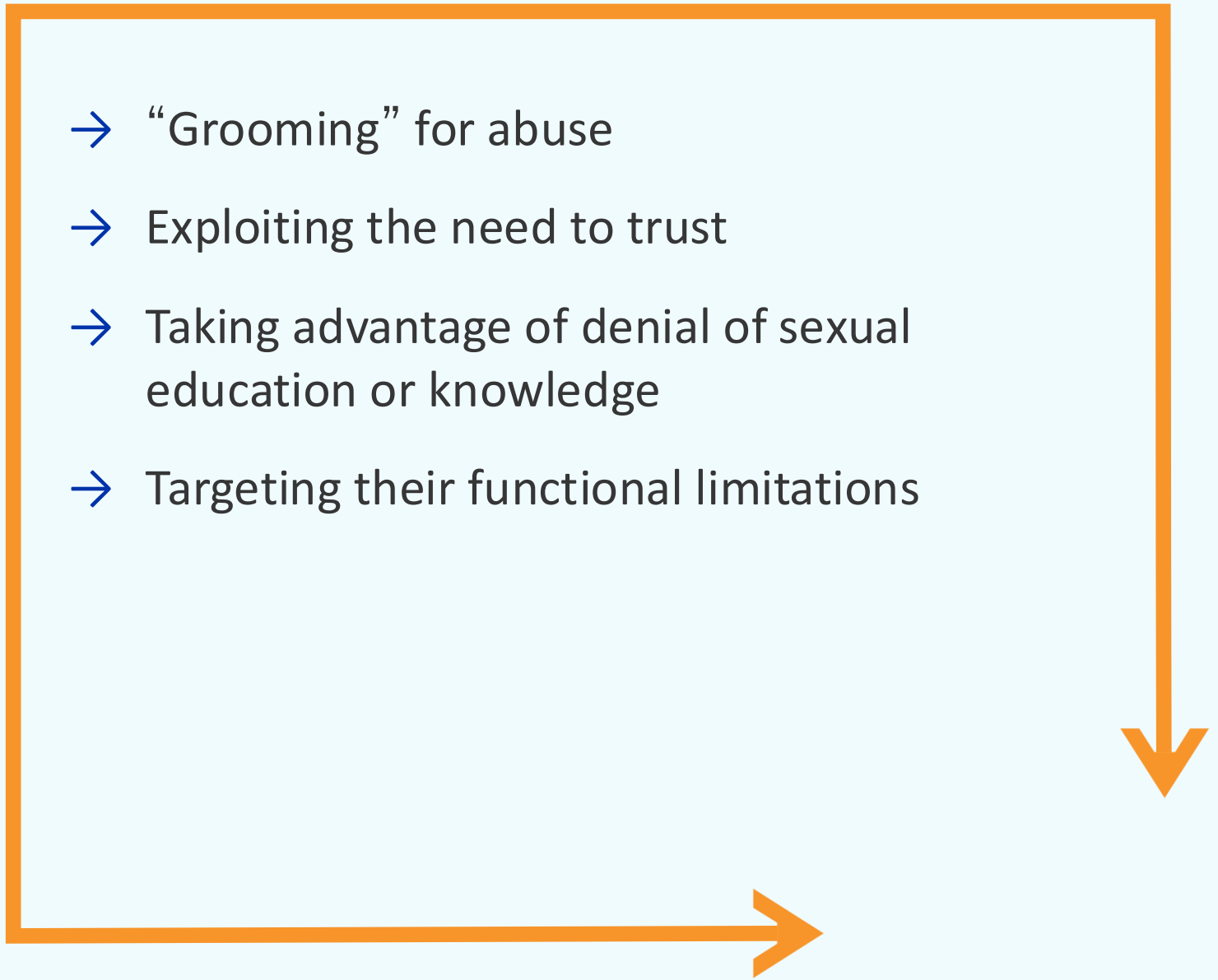
Abusers and their Tactics

Abusers

- The vast majority of abusers are known and hold positions of power or authority
- 44% of them have a relationship with the individual because of their disability.
  - Caregivers
  - Attendants
  - Drivers
- Family members
- Partners, Girlfriends, Boyfriends
- Acquaintances

Abuser Tactics (Sexual Violence)

- “Grooming” for abuse
- Exploiting the need to trust
- Taking advantage of denial of sexual education or knowledge
- Targeting their functional limitations



Abuser Tactics (Domestic Violence)

- Becoming a relied-upon, or primary, caregiver before beginning the abuse
- Giving her drugs without her knowledge, forcing her to take drugs or medication, or giving her more than was prescribed
- Threatening, injuring or scaring away service animal
- Using transportation options for stalking route
- Hiding mobility devices or putting them right out of her reach
- Attacking before she can sense what is coming.

Impact and Barriers

Impact

- → Loss of autonomy, independence
  - → System may respond by removing personal care attendant, changing housing, appointing a guardian
- → Psychological impact
  - → PTSD, rape trauma syndrome, trauma responses such as “flight, fight, or freeze”
- → Physical impact
  - → Exacerbation of disability

Barriers Within Victim Services

- Barriers exist in domestic and sexual violence programs, health care settings, the criminal justice system, and other areas for these survivors.
  - Physical barriers
  - Communication barriers
  - Attitudinal barriers
- Service providers may lack knowledge of disability in general
- Policies in place may prevent survivors with disabilities from using the services

Addressing the Barriers

Identify the barriers within your agency

- → Conduct a thorough access review of your agency
- → Document your findings
- → Develop a plan to address the barriers
- → Repeat annually



Questions and Answers

Next Session: August 18th

Conducting Access Reviews