

Purpose

The purpose of this alert is to remind those who are involved in providing care, managing programs, investigating or overseeing the investigation of alleged sexual abuse cases about the importance of recognizing the signs and symptoms of sexual abuse, implementing immediate actions and timely reporting. The Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD) has identified these red flags through review of sexual abuse cases and although they are not seen frequently, they are important to identify in order to provide supports to the individuals we serve.

All DD Employees are required to be trained, annually, on identification and reporting of Major Unusual Incidents (MUIs) and Unusual Incidents (UIs) prior to direct contact. This training includes the review of any Health and Welfare Alerts released since the previous calendar year's training.

For questions or comments regarding this alert, please contact the MUI/Registry Unit at (614) 995-3810.



Service providers have duties and responsibilities to protect individuals from harm, including reporting suspected sexual abuse. Unfortunately, sexual abuse is under-reported. This means that incidents of suspected sexual abuse are not reported to the proper authorities as they should. "Sexual abuse" is defined as unlawful sexual conduct or sexual contact as those terms are defined in section 2907.01 of the Revised Code and the commission of any act prohibited by section 2907.09 of the Revised Code (e.g., public indecency, importuning, and voyeurism).

There are different reasons why suspected sexual abuse may not be reported. These include the following:

- The individual may not be able to clearly express what occurred (or is occurring) in ways that others understand.
- The individual may not realize that he or she has been victimized.
- The individual may be afraid to reveal what has occurred.
- The individual's allegations may be dismissed as fabrications or untruthful reports.

- Persons aware of the suspected sexual abuse may be reluctant to get help and remain silent.
- Possible signs of sexual abuse are not recognized or are not fully considered by staff and others close to the individual.
- Staff may fear reprisal if a co-worker is the suspected perpetrator.
- Staff may be uncertain if the actions described or observed constitute sexual abuse.
- Staff may also be uncertain about what to do – how the suspected sexual abuse should be reported, and to whom.

When suspected sexual abuse is not reported, the individual may continue to be victimized and suffer the consequences repeatedly. Needed services and supports to assist the individual in response to such an event cannot then be provided.

Service Providers of all types must be prepared to respond to incidents of suspected sexual abuse. Listed on the following page are basic steps that service providers should take to protect the health and welfare of the person.

Be aware of the possible signs of sexual abuse

This includes but is not limited to:

- Bruising, bleeding, soreness, redness, irritation, itching, and unusual discharges;
- Torn or stained underwear or linens;
- Difficulty in walking or sitting;
- Ongoing and unexplained health problems such as stomach pain;
- Display of new fears;
- Withdrawal from previously enjoyable activities, places, or persons. The person may suddenly avoid these places or people, or display fear or discomfort;
- Changes in sleep patterns such as nightmares, trouble sleeping, sudden bedwetting, and other sleep problems;
- Dressing in layers of clothing;
- Changes in appetite, loss of appetite, weight gain or loss;
- Resistance to being touched or undergoing physical examination;
- Sudden or marked changes in behavior; for example, aggression, attention-seeking behavior, self-destructive behavior, depression, refusal to participate in activities, clinging to others;
- New sexual knowledge or sexual behavior, including hints about sexual activity;
- Unexplained accumulation of money or gifts;
- Loss of self-confidence or self-esteem;
- Sexually transmitted diseases;
- Attempts of running away and
- Desperately seeking affection from others.

Take action if an individual communicates that he or she has been abused. Do not ignore or dismiss any such reports regardless of whether or not they appear plausible. The proper authorities will determine what occurred. **Report according to O.A.C. 5123:2-17-02 to Law Enforcement or CSB and to the County Board of DD immediately but within 4 hours. Immediately protect the individual from continued contact with the Primary Person Involved (PPI).** If the PPI is a staff member, the staff member should be removed from a position of direct contact with individuals. If the alleged PPI is someone other than staff, necessary precautions should be taken to protect others who may be at risk.



Remember: "The sound a victim makes when sexually assaulted is often silence."

Steps to Take

- Get the individual appropriate medical attention immediately.
- Take immediate action to protect the person from further assault
- Report immediately to law enforcement or CSB
- Report to the County Board immediately but within 4 hours
- Sexual assault assessment, when appropriate, should be sought immediately.
- Screen the individual for pregnancy and/or sexually transmitted disease.
- Remember to NOT imply blame on the victim.
- Ask questions like "Were you able to?" instead of "Why didn't you?" when talking to the individual.
- Emotionally support the alleged victim.
- Remember to refer the individual for counseling and victim's assistance as appropriate.
- Notify DODD MUI Unit if the alleged PPI is a County Board Employee.

More Info

For further assistance regarding sexual assaults contact

The Arc National Center on Criminal Justice and Disability
<http://www.thearc.org/NCCJD/publications>

Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence
1.888.876.8388

Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network
1.800.656.4673

National Sexual Violence Resource Center
<http://www.nsvrc.org/>

Directory of Rape Crisis Centers
<http://www.oaesv.org/rape-crisis-centers-in-ohio/>

Office for Victims of Crime:
<http://ovc.ncjrs.gov/Topic.aspx?topicid=62>

Vera Institute of Justice:
"Forging New Collaborations: A Guide for Rape Crisis, Domestic Violence, and Disability Organizations":
<http://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/Forging%20New%20Collaborations%20PDF.pdf>

The Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities MUI Registry Unit
1800 Sullivant Avenue
Columbus, Ohio 43222
☎ 614-995-3810
www.dodd.ohio.gov