

## **Tips On What To Do If A Person With A Disability Discloses Abuse During the Brandon Training School Oral History Project**

Allow the person to tell you what happened and help them identify their feelings. Remember that telling someone about a painful experience may be frightening to anybody, including a person with a disability. Persons with disabilities may test the waters by telling a little information first. Others may tell their whole story only once.

These are good things to say to the person:

- I believe you
- It took a lot of courage to talk about it
- I am so sorry this happened to you
- It is not your fault
- You don't need to feel ashamed
- You don't have to be alone
- It is okay to feel angry or scared
- This has happened to other people
- What are you most concerned about right now?
- What is most important to you right now?
- Who is a safe person in your life? Can you talk to them about this? Ask if they want you to go and find someone they trust to come and be with them.

Ask questions to clarify if this is the first time they have told someone or is the person sharing an experience they already reported.

Remain calm, be open, use caution, and be aware of own personal beliefs or biases. It is important to provide emotional support but refrain from hugging or touching the person.

Do not make promises or assurances that are out your control (i.e., "We're going to make sure this will never happen again." Or "You don't have to be afraid anymore.")

## **Things You Can Do if the Abuse Happened Recently or Is Still Happening**

If the person tells you about a dangerous situation that is happening now you could say:

- This doesn't sound safe for you.
- What do you do to stay safe? Is that working for you?
- Who is a safe person in your life? Can you talk to them about this? There are other people who can help you with that.

Give the person the number of the **Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence** hotline phone number: **1-800-489-7273** (toll free). Explain to the person that the people on the hotline can help them figure out what to do to be safe. Support the person to place the call. Encourage the person to say they have a disability and ask for any support they need.

Talk to the person about calling and reporting this crime to the police. Provide information about what would happen if s/he reported, and help her/him to identify supports if s/he decides to report. An advocate can be very helpful if a person thinks s/he might want to report to police. Finally, it is important to respect her/his decision about whether or not to report to the police.

## **Mandated Reporting**

If you are a mandated reporter and the incident has occurred recently follow Vermont's reporting procedures for suspected abuse, neglect, and/or exploitation of a vulnerable adult. The **Adult Protective Services (APS)** hotline number is **1-800-564-1612** (toll free). Please give the person a choice to:

- Call APS and self-report in private.
- Call APS and have you there when they make the report.
- Have you call APS with them present

One needs only a suspicion to report abuse, not evidence. It is the investigators' job to determine if the disability meets the definition of vulnerable adult and whether the person needs protective services. In Vermont, it is a prosecutable offense if you have cause to believe that a vulnerable adult has been or may be further adversely affected by abuse, neglect or exploitation and you knowingly fail to report. If you have concerns about the person's safety, share this with the person and brainstorm together about a safe place where they could meet with APS.

### **Things You Can Do if the Abuse Happened a Long Time Ago**

See the suggestions on page 2. It is also recommended that you report the alleged abuse to APS even if the incident happened many years ago (e.g., at BTS). Let the person know that it will be difficult to investigate and is highly unlikely that APS will actually open a case. Check to see if the person is alright and if they need someone to talk to.

#### Remember:

- Do not tell the person what to do.
- The person gets to decide what happens next.
- Support the person's decisions.
- Help them out if needed.

#### The person might want to:

- Do nothing
- Talk to another safe person
- Make a complaint

## Taking Care of Yourself

It can be upsetting to hear about someone being abused. Here are some things that interviewers can think about to help prepare in case someone talks about being abused:

- What is your own coping style?
- How will you will relax and de-stress after the interview?
- Who are safe people in your life that you can talk to if you feel stressed?



### IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS USED IN THIS BOOKLET



Green Mountain Self Advocates  
(GMSA)

802-229-2600

Toll free in Vermont:

1-800-564-9990



Vermont's Network  
Against  
Domestic and Sexual Violence

1-800-489-7273



SafeSpace

1-866-869-7341



Vermont Adult  
Protective Services

1-800-564-1612