

## About ACCD and This Brochure

The Alberta Committee of Citizens with Disabilities (ACCD) is a consumer-driven, provincial organization of persons within the cross-disability community. We actively promote the full participation of persons with disabilities within the social, economic, and political life of our communities.

We believe that all people have the right to be safe and to be protected from abuse. Recent research we've undertaken shows that women with disabilities are extremely vulnerable to violence and abuse. We want to share our findings with you and encourage you to join us as we work to end the violence.

## What is Abuse?

Abuse occurs when a person in a position of power takes advantage of someone in a less powerful position. There are many types of abuse, including financial, physical, sexual, verbal, and emotional. Neglect and exploitation are also types of abuse.



*Together, We Hold The Power!*

## Did You Know?

Women with disabilities in Canada “face the threat and the reality of all forms of violence confronting non-disabled women, but their disability compounds, alters, and increases their vulnerability” (Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women).

Statistics concerning violence against women with disabilities paint a grim picture.

- › 83% of women with disabilities will be abused in their lifetime. (Stimpson and Best, 1991)
- › An Alberta study found that 88% of victims with disabilities knew their abusers. (Sobsey, 1988)
- › 40% of women with developmental and/or learning disabilities will be victims of sexual abuse before they turn eighteen. (Morin and Biosvert, 1992)
- › More than 50% of perpetrators in violence against persons with disabilities are paid caregivers, family members, or other persons with disabilities. (Sobsey and Doe, 1991)
- › 39% of women with disabilities have been physically or sexually abused by their husbands. (Statistics Canada, 1994)

## Why are Women with Disabilities More Vulnerable to Abuse?

Like you, we at ACCD are shocked and appalled to hear about the violence faced by many women with disabilities. How can this be happening in a society that respects and values all individuals?

The Canadian Association of Independent Living Centres (CAILC) suggests that women with disabilities are more vulnerable to abuse because society's perceptions of them are clouded by myths and stereotypes.

Take a minute to examine your own perceptions of women with disabilities. Have you ever thought that women with disabilities

- › Are like children?
- › Are not sexual?
- › Need you to make decisions for them?
- › Are helpless and need our pity?
- › Are overly sexual?
- › Do not contribute to society?
- › Need special treatment?

***If you answered yes to any of these questions, you are contributing to a perception of women with disabilities that increases their vulnerability to abuse.***

## What Can We Do?

First of all, we need to examine our perceptions regarding women with disabilities. We need to raise our own level of awareness and educate ourselves about the realities, not the myths, shaping the lives of women with disabilities in Alberta.

Secondly, we need to raise the awareness of others. By educating people in our homes, workplaces, volunteer organizations, and communities we can begin to challenge stereotypical views.

There are many service organizations committed to raising awareness about violence against women with disabilities in Alberta.

Please call one of the numbers on the back panel and ask about guest speakers, invite us to speak to you, your colleagues, your constituents, your child's school, your rotary club or community organization, your community league, etc.

ACCD believes we all have a role in making Alberta a safer place for women with disabilities. Together, we can make a difference!



## For More Information

### **ACCD**

707, 10339 – 124 Street NW  
Edmonton, AB T5N 3W1  
Phone: 1-800-387-2514  
TTY: (780) 488-9090  
WWW: [www.accd.net](http://www.accd.net)  
e-mail: [accd@accd.net](mailto:accd@accd.net)

### **Persons with Developmental Disabilities**

Provincial Board  
4th Floor, 10011 - 109 Street  
Edmonton, AB T5J 3S8  
Phone: (780) 427-1177 or toll free 310-0000

### **Independent Living Resource Centre of Calgary**

7 – 11 Street NE  
Calgary, AB T2E 4Z2  
Phone: (403) 263-6880  
TTY: (403) 263-6874

### **Independent Living Society**

205, 10006 – 101 Avenue  
Grande Prairie, AB T8V 0X9  
Phone: (780) 539-0433

### **The Office for the Prevention of Family Violence**

10030 - 107 Street  
Edmonton, AB. T5J 3E4  
Phone: (780) 422-5916  
Toll-free 310-0000

*If the organizations listed here are not in your community, they will be able to refer you to a local contact.*

*ACCD acknowledges the support of Status of Women Canada in the production of this series of brochures.*



Alberta Committee of Citizens with Disabilities

## Violence Against Women with Disabilities:

## Facts About Abuse



## About ACCD and This Brochure

The Alberta Committee of Citizens with Disabilities (ACCD) is a consumer-driven, provincial organization of persons within the cross-disability community. We actively promote the full participation of persons with disabilities within the social, economic, and political life of our communities.

ACCD believes that all people have the right to be safe and to be protected from abuse. Recent research we've undertaken shows that women with disabilities are extremely vulnerable to violence and abuse.

In some cases, abuse may happen because you are not sure what it is or what you are able to do about it. We want to share some information we've gathered in the hopes that we can answer your questions and end the violence that many women with disabilities face.

### What is Abuse?

Abuse occurs when a person in a position of power takes advantage of someone in a less powerful position. There are many types of abuse, including financial, physical, sexual, verbal, and emotional. Neglect and exploitation are also types of abuse.

## How Do You Know If You're Being Abused?

Sometimes you might wonder if people you know or don't know are treating you properly. The following sections give examples of actions that are abusive. If someone is treating you in these ways, they shouldn't be! It is not right!

### What is physical abuse?

You are being physically abused if someone hurts you with physical contact. This could mean punching, hitting, kicking, biting, pushing, or restraining you. If your caregiver handles you roughly or isolates you from other people, this is also abuse.

### What is sexual abuse?

You are being sexually abused if someone kisses you when you don't want to be kissed. Or if someone touches your body in places that you don't want touched. You are also being abused if someone forces you into a sexual activity. If your caregiver helps you with personal care tasks such as bathing and hygiene routines, he or she needs to do so in a way that you are comfortable with. Remember that sexual abuse can come from males or females.



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## What is emotional abuse?

If you are being treated physically or verbally in a way that makes you embarrassed, humiliated, or upset, you may be experiencing emotional abuse. If someone says mean things to you, doesn't allow you to make decisions, threatens you, or keeps you isolated from others, you are being emotionally abused.

### What is neglect?

If your caregiver or other support providers do not provide you with the food, shelter, personal care, or medical attention you need, in a timely fashion, you are being neglected.

### What is exploitation?

If a caregiver or anyone else takes advantage of you, you are being exploited. They may use their position to take money they've not earned or ask you for money or belongings. They may also ask you to do things that you know are wrong or that you are uncomfortable with. Because you may depend on them for care or companionship, you feel you have to do what they say. They are exploiting their relationship with you.

***If you think you are being mistreated in any of these ways, you are being abused. It is not right! Something needs to be done.***

## What Should You Do If You Think You're Being Abused?

It is not always easy to tell someone that you think you are being abused. If you do tell someone, they may be able to help put a stop to the abuse.

We encourage you to tell someone you trust—a friend, a doctor, someone from a church or other community group. They can help you escape the abuse you are facing! They can also support you through the process of reporting and ending the abuse.

## There is Help Available

There are many service organizations committed to assisting women with disabilities as they address violence or abuse in their lives.

Some of these organizations offer training that will help you be more assertive when you interact with others. Other programs provide counselling to help you address the feelings you are having about the abuse. And there are “shelters” or “safe places” if you feel you must move from where you live.

In an emergency situation, contact the police, RCMP, or a women's shelter. **Numbers are listed in your phone book.**

## For More Information

**ACCD**  
707, 10339 – 124 Street NW  
Edmonton, AB T5N 3W1  
Phone: 1-800-387-2514  
TTY: (780) 488-9090  
Web Site: [www.accd.net](http://www.accd.net)  
e-mail: [accd@accd.net](mailto:accd@accd.net)

**Alberta Council of Women's Shelters**  
2-12739 Fort Road NW  
Edmonton, AB T5A 1A7  
Phone: (780) 456-7000  
e-mail: [voice@acws.ca](mailto:voice@acws.ca)

**Independent Living Resource Centre of Calgary**  
7 – 11 Street NE  
Calgary, AB T2E 4Z2  
Phone: (403) 263-6880  
TTY: (403) 263-6874

**Independent Living Society**  
205, 10006 – 101 Avenue  
Grande Prairie, AB T8V 0X9  
Phone: (780) 539-0433

*If the organizations listed here are not in your community, they will be able to refer you to a local contact. As well, ACCD can refer you to appropriate organizations. Call us at 1-800-387-2514 or visit our web site at [www.accd.net](http://www.accd.net).*

*This brochure is based on a similar brochure produced by Persons with Developmental Disabilities, Alberta Provincial Board.*

*ACCD acknowledges the support of Status of Women Canada in the production of this series of brochures.*



Alberta Committee of Citizens with Disabilities

## Violence Against Women with Disabilities:

## Are You Being Abused?



## About ACCD and This Brochure

The Alberta Committee of Citizens with Disabilities (ACCD) is a consumer-driven, provincial organization of persons within the cross-disability community. We actively promote the full participation of persons with disabilities within the social, economic, and political life of our communities.

We believe that all people have the right to be safe and to be protected from abuse. Recent research we've undertaken shows that women with disabilities are extremely vulnerable to violence and abuse.

In this brochure we want to answer questions you may have about identifying abuse and supporting women with disabilities who are being abused. We encourage you to join us as we work to end the violence.

## What is Abuse?

Abuse occurs when a person in a position of power takes advantage of someone in a less powerful position. There are many types of abuse, including financial, physical, sexual, verbal, and emotional. Neglect and exploitation are also types of abuse.



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## How Can You Tell if Someone Is Being Abused?

Have you ever wondered if a woman with a disability whom you know or care for is being abused? Often, there are signs or “indicators” when abuse occurs. Here are some of the indicators you can look for to confirm your suspicions about abuse.

### Possible signs of physical abuse

- › Unexplained or unusual injuries, such as bruises, burns, cuts, broken bones, bite marks, etc.
- › Defensive response when you ask about an injury.
- › Wary of physical contact.
- › Sleep disturbances.
- › Signs of new injuries before old injuries have healed.

### Possible signs of sexual abuse

- › Stained or torn clothing and underclothing.
- › Emotional trauma.
- › A significant change in sexual behaviour or attitude.
- › Pain while walking or sitting with evasive or illogical explanations.
- › Regression to childlike behaviour.
- › Inappropriate sexual behaviour.

## Possible signs of emotional abuse

- › Extreme, unusual behaviour, such as aggression, compliance, or withdrawal.
- › Constant apologies.
- › Destructive behaviour.
- › Decreased ability to cope with familiar situations.
- › High levels of anxiety, especially when asked to return to a certain place or accompany a certain person.
- › Lack of attachment to others.

### Possible signs of neglect

- › Poor hygiene.
- › The same clothes worn every day.
- › Unattended medical or dental needs.
- › Underweight or overweight (when not associated with the disability).
- › Unhappy with care she is receiving, but feels unable to change situation.
- › Frequent unexplained hospitalization.

***If you suspect a woman with a disability is being abused, listen to her carefully and pay attention to her behaviour. If you notice any of the possible signs listed above, she may need your assistance.***

(Note: These lists do not provide *all* possible indicators.)

## What Should You Do If Someone You Know Is Being Abused?

- › Listen to her story in her own words.
- › Help the individual to communicate if her disability affects her ability to communicate clearly. Be patient.
- › Don't panic or make assumptions. Take her story seriously. Accept what she tells you as the truth.
- › Get assistance as soon as possible. If there has been a sexual or physical attack, she should be examined and treated for her injuries as soon as possible.
- › Find and explain options about reporting abuse. (See contact list on back panel.) Respect her right to make decisions about the options that are available.
- › If the individual is in danger, assist her in getting to a safe place.
- › If you are a paid care provider, follow your organization's protocols on abuse reporting.



## For More Information

### ACCD

707, 10339 – 124 Street NW  
Edmonton, AB T5N 3W1  
Phone: 1-800-387-2514  
TTY: (780) 488-9090  
Web Site: [www.accd.net](http://www.accd.net)  
e-mail: [accd@accd.net](mailto:accd@accd.net)

### Alberta Council of Women's Shelters

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### Independent Living Resource Centre of Calgary

7 – 11 Street NE  
Calgary, AB T2E 4Z2  
Phone: (403) 263-6880  
TTY: (403) 263-6874

### Independent Living Society

205, 10006 – 101 Avenue  
Grande Prairie, AB T8V 0X9  
Phone: (780) 539-0433

### Persons with Developmental Disabilities

Provincial Board  
4th Floor 10011 - 109 Street  
Edmonton, AB T5J 3S8  
Phone: (780) 427-1177 or toll free 310-0000

### Your Community Police or RCMP Office Numbers are listed on the Inside Cover of Your Phone Book

*If the organizations listed here are not in your community, they will be able to refer you to a local contact.*

*This brochure is developed with information received from Persons with Developmental Disabilities, Alberta Provincial Board and on the booklet "Responding to the Abuse" produced by Advocacy Resource Centre for the Handicapped.*

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Alberta Committee of Citizens with Disabilities

## Violence Against Women with Disabilities: Is Someone You Know Being Abused?



## About ACCD and This Brochure

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We would like to share our findings with you and encourage you to join us as we work to end the violence.

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## Why Are Women with Disabilities More Vulnerable to Abuse?

The Canadian Association of Independent Living Centres (CAILC) suggests that women with disabilities are more vulnerable to abuse because society's perceptions of them are clouded by myths and stereotypes.

Take a minute to examine your own perceptions of women with disabilities. Have you ever thought or been taught that women with disabilities

- › Are like children?
- › Are not sexual?
- › Need you to make decisions for them?
- › Are helpless and need your pity?
- › Do not contribute to society?
- › Are overly sexual?
- › Need special treatment?

Unfortunately, such myths affect the ways that many of us care for and interact with women with disabilities. These perceptions make women with disabilities more vulnerable to violence.



## The Client/Caregiver Relationship

ACCD believes that, for the most part, caregivers choose their profession because they genuinely care for people. However, the nature of the relationship between caregivers and the people they support creates a power imbalance. If caregivers do not receive proper training, they may unintentionally misuse their power and take advantage of the women they are caring for.

## What Caregivers Can Do

- › Remember that women with disabilities know their disability best.
- › Respect what your clients tell you.
- › Examine your own perceptions regarding women with disabilities.
- › Educate yourself about the realities, not the myths that shape the lives of women with disabilities.
- › Remember that the women you care for are unique, contributing members of society.
- › Support women with disabilities in achieving independence.

## What Training Organizations Can Do

- › Ensure that your training addresses the myths and stereotypes faced by women with disabilities.
- › Invite women with disabilities to speak to your students about their personal experiences with the care system. This *consumer-directed approach* to training will provide your students with valuable insights concerning this most vital profession.

## What Home Care Agencies Can Do

- › Provide professional development for your care providers that addresses the myths and stereotypes faced by women with disabilities.
- › Invite women with disabilities to speak to your care providers about their personal experiences with the care system.
- › Review your agency's abuse reporting and investigation protocols. Include a consumer perspective in your review.

## What ACCD Can Do For You

- › Put you in touch with an organization in your area.
- › Provide you with information from our library.
- › Arrange to have a woman with a disability meet with you and your colleagues to share insights about this serious issue.

## For More Information

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7 - 11 Street NE  
Calgary, AB T2E 4Z2  
Phone: (403) 263-6880  
TTY: (403) 263-6874

*ACCD has other brochures in this series that you may be interested in. You can call our office or visit our web site to access these brochures.*

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## Violence Against Women with Disabilities: What Paid Caregivers Need To Know



## About ACCD and This Brochure

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We believe that all people have the right to be safe and to be protected from abuse. Recent research we've undertaken shows that women with disabilities are extremely vulnerable to violence and abuse.

We would like to share our findings with you and support you in the important role you have as a family caregiver.

### What is Abuse?

Abuse occurs when a person in a position of power takes advantage of someone in a less powerful position. There are many types of abuse, including financial, physical, sexual, verbal, and emotional. Neglect and exploitation are also types of abuse.



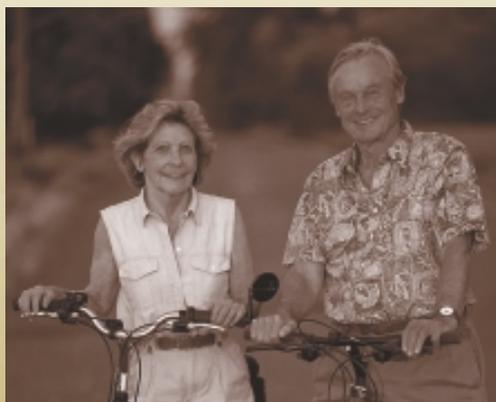
*Together, We Hold The Power!*

## Caring for a Family Member with a Disability

As a caregiver of a family member with a disability, do you find

- › You are taking on new and challenging responsibilities?
- › You must deal with situations that are unfamiliar?
- › The supports you need are not available when you need them?
- › The nature of your relationship with a family member is different because a disability is a part of her life?
- › Caring for a family member with a disability can be stressful and tiring?
- › Sometimes there is so much to learn and do that you feel overwhelmed?

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, you are not alone. Many family caregivers feel the same way.



It is also true, however, that the nature of the relationship between caregivers and the people they support creates a power imbalance. Combined with caregiver stress, this imbalance can place a family member with a disability in a potentially harmful situation.

### What Can Family Caregivers Do?

Take advantage of specialized training so that you feel more comfortable in your role as a family caregiver. Learn how to address a woman's physical and emotional needs when you provide care.

Support your family member to achieve independence to the best of her ability.

Contact your regional health authority, a home care agency, or respite care agency to find out what supports and services are available in your area.

Check with local churches, community organizations, or volunteer groups to see if they provide support that might augment government supports.

Join support groups that are relevant to your situation (e.g. MS, Alzheimer's, Diabetes, Brain Injury). Sharing stories and ideas with other family caregivers may make your situation more manageable.

# What Should You Do If A Family Member Tells You She Is Being Abused?

As a family caregiver, your wife, mother, daughter, or sister with a disability may confide in you if she is being abused. The following guidelines provide some basic information about what to do in these situations.

- › Listen to her story in her own words.
- › Help her communicate if her disability affects her ability to communicate clearly. Be patient.
- › Don't panic or make assumptions. Take her story seriously. Accept what she tells you as the truth.
- › Get assistance as soon as possible. If there has been a sexual or physical attack, she should be examined and treated for her injuries as soon as possible.
- › Find and explain options about reporting abuse. (See contact list on back panel.) Respect her right to make decisions about the options that are available.
- › If she is in danger, assist her in getting to a safe place.

Note: If you suspect your family member with a disability is being abused, please refer to other brochures in this series to assist you in recognizing and addressing this serious issue.

## For More Information

### ACCD

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Web Site: [www.accd.net](http://www.accd.net)  
e-mail: [accd@accd.net](mailto:accd@accd.net)

### Persons with Developmental Disabilities

Provincial Board  
4th Floor, 10011 - 109 Street  
Edmonton, AB T5J 3S8  
Phone: (780) 427-1177 or toll free 310-0000

### Grant MacEwan College, Millwoods Campus, Residential Aide Training Program

7319 - 29 Avenue NW  
Edmonton, AB T6K 2P1  
Phone: (780) 497-4061

### Independent Living Resource Centre of Calgary

7 - 11 Street NE  
Calgary, AB T2E 4Z2  
Phone: (403) 263-6880  
TTY: (403) 263-6874

### Medicine Hat College Home Care Attendant Program

299 College Drive SE  
Medicine Hat, AB T1A 3Y6  
Phone: (403) 529-3906

### Independent Living Society

205, 10006 - 101 Avenue  
Grande Prairie, AB T8V 0X9  
Phone: (780) 539-0433

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Alberta Committee of Citizens with Disabilities

# Violence Against Women with Disabilities: What Family Caregivers Need To Know



*Fifth in a series of five*