

Child Victims with Disabilities

Overview and Statistics



Statistics

Children with Disabilities and Victimization (USDOJ, 2017)



The rate of violence experienced by youth aged 12 to 19 with disabilities was more than five times higher than for youth without disabilities.

Children and youth with disabilities are more likely than children and youth without disabilities:

- To experience physical abuse resulting in bodily injury.
- To experience serious sexual offenses, including those involving:
 - > Penetration
 - > Use of force
 - > Threats

(Hershkowitz, Lamb, & Horowitz, 2007)

Children with learning disabilities experience digital penetration or oral copulation at triple the rate of other children without disabilities

(Helton, Gochez-Kerr, & Gruber, 2017)

According to studies including almost 160,000 children, children with intellectual disabilities are:

- 2.9–3.7 times as likely to be neglected
- 3.4–3.8 times as likely to be emotionally abused
- 3.8–5.3 times as likely to be physically abused
- 4.0–6.4 times as likely to be sexually abused

(Spencer et al., 2005; Sullivan & Knutson, 2000)

Increased Susceptibility Due To:

- Lack of sexual/body education
- Biases and assumptions:
 - > Individuals with disabilities are not sexual
 - > Kids with disabilities cannot be interviewed
 - > Kids with disabilities cannot accurately report
- Suspects choose victims who are less likely to report, be believed, or understand what constitutes abuse

Strategies for a Forensic Interview

DO

- Gather as much information about how the child communicates prior to the interview
- Ask questions of service providers and non-offending caregivers:
 - > How does the child communicate?
 - > What are his/her best skill sets?
 - > Do they take any medications? Did they take those medications today?
 - > Do they have any triggers?
 - > What de-escalation techniques have worked in the past?
 - > What does the child know about the interview?
 - > Who did the child disclose to?
- Use early, open-ended prompts to establish a baseline for how the child communicates
- Use language that is concrete and literal
- Utilize patience, silence, and pausing
- Allow the child to explain what happened in his or her own words

DON'T

- Avoid idioms and figures of speech
- Don't make assumptions based on diagnoses
- Don't make assumptions about body language or facial expressions (or lack of), most kids without disabilities have neutral facial expressions when reporting or disclosing abuse
- Avoid temptations to fill in the blank or the silence, especially if the child has a communication disorder
- Don't have expectations about how much or the type of detail a child can recall since memory can be impacted by trauma

Strategies for MDT Members

DO

- Know there are accommodations that can be made in court to ensure that kids with disabilities have full and equal rights to provide testimony to the best of their ability
- Recognize necessary accommodations may require more time and patience
- Work with non-offending caregivers

DON'T

- Don't assume that a disability prevents a child from being able to accurately report and/or testify
- Don't base the entire investigation on the forensic interview
- Don't be afraid to interview other potential witnesses with disabilities

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