



Working to End Assault & Violence for Everyone

**SUPPORTING SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT WITH
INTELLECTUAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES**

A DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR DISABILITY SERVICES STAFF

This discussion guide is intended to accompany the videos found under the Disability Services Staff tab in the WEAVE section of the YWCA West Central Michigan website.

ywcawcmi.org/weave





Supporting Survivors of Sexual Assault with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

If you suspect or need to report assault go [here](#) right now.

Or call the YWCA 24/7 Help line at 616-454-YWCA (9922)

The YWCA is here to help. All people are welcome here. The YWCA serves people of ALL ages and genders including men. The YWCA welcomes people of any age, education, disability, ethnicity, gender, height, income, language, race, religion, sexual orientation, or weight.

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Supporting Survivors of Sexual Assault with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

What is WEAVE?

WEAVE is a collaboration of service providers in Kent County that specialize in disability services and sexual violence prevention. The collaborating organizations currently involved in WEAVE are the YWCA West Central Michigan, MOKA, Community Living Supports, Thresholds, and the Down Syndrome Association of West Michigan. In addition to these agencies, Pine Rest, Spectrum Community Services, Hope Network Developmental and Community Services, public and family guardians, and individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) have participated in the development of WEAVE projects.

The mission of WEAVE is to examine and enhance systems for serving individuals with I/DD to reduce the risk of sexual violence and to better serve and empower individuals with I/DD who have survived sexual assault/abuse.

For more information about the history of WEAVE, check out the WEAVE Collaboration Charter, Needs Assessment Report, and Strategic Plan on the WEAVE tab of the YWCA West Central Michigan Website:
www.ywcawcmi.org



Supporting Survivors of Sexual Assault with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

How can I support safety for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities?

The WEAVE Perspective combines the Culture of Gentleness and Trauma Informed Principles. The next page provides ways you can use the WEAVE perspective to create a safe and supportive environment.

The WEAVE Perspective





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How can I support safety for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (continued)?

You can use the WEAVE Perspective as a guide for creating a safe and supportive environment by:

- Watching for signs of abuse and grooming behavior.
- Encouraging questions, opinions, and learning about healthy relationships, sexuality and safety.
- Encouraging people with I/DD to make choices, including saying “no.”
- Talking about safety, rights, sexuality and respect as part of our support to individuals with I/DD.
- Trusting and supportive relationships form the foundation of recovery and safety.
- Many different actions, attitudes or environments may prompt a traumatic memory or trauma response for survivors of sexual assault. Tone of voice, scents, certain objects, settings, or touch are examples of situations that could bring back a traumatic memory and cause distress. Paying attention to our own behavior and honoring feelings creates safety.
- Trauma and distress appear in many ways: sexualized behavior, aggression, withdrawal, clinginess, avoidance or anger. Behavior communicates a valuable message. Approach individuals expressing these behaviors with empathy. You may not know the cause of the trauma or distress. The most important thing is to provide support.
- When we are predictable, kind, and reliable we are more likely to learn about abuse from the people we serve. Take the time to listen.
- Trauma “has no clock.” Recognize that abuse from years ago can shape behavior today.



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Guidelines for Facilitating Discussion

Please note that this guide and the accompanying videos are intended to be used for staff training of disability service providers. It may be helpful to know that the scenarios included in these videos are dramatizations of scenarios that could happen, not actual disclosures. These videos may be best viewed in small groups. It is important that individuals who are available for follow-up conversations about the material be identified for training participants.

As you will learn in the accompanying videos, it is important that staff increase their comfort level in discussing sexual violence in order to safely address concerning behavior and disclosures of sexual violence from individuals being served. Engaging with material about sexual assault can be uncomfortable for many of us. By informing ourselves on this sensitive topic, we are better able to center the voices of survivors. It is important to acknowledge a disproportionate number of helping professionals are survivors of domestic and sexual violence themselves. By recognizing the impact of our own experiences, we are better able to cope with the difficult emotions that may come up when hearing an individual's disclosure. If you need support, you can call the YWCA 24/7 at **(616) 454-9922** to speak with an Advocate.

Questions to Consider Before Viewing Videos

Think about messages you have received about sexuality in your life. How did those messages impact you? How might those messages differ for individuals with and without disabilities? Now, think about messages you have received about violence. How are those messages the same or different when the violence is sexual violence?



Supporting Survivors of Sexual Assault with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

Video #1 Discussion Questions

1. How will learning about this topic help you to support the individuals you serve?
2. Why might this be a difficult topic to talk about? How can you take care of yourself today?
3. Not all sexual interactions with individuals with I/DD are assaultive. People with I/DD can be in healthy, consensual, romantic relationships. Sexual assault is not about sex or romance. How do you think you can support this distinction in your workplace?
4. The video identifies three factors related to sexual assault- power difference, behavior is unwanted or confusing, and no consent. Were any of these factors surprising?
5. How are the individuals you serve often made vulnerable to sexual assault?
6. Grooming behaviors serve to condition an individual and those around them, including service providers. What is your role in recognizing these behaviors?
7. What would help you process your feelings and knowledge gained after viewing this video?



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Video #2 Discussion Questions

1. One negative impact of sexual assault is unhealthy learning about sex and relationships. How can you help to disrupt these unhealthy lessons?
2. The video describes the symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and how individuals may develop behaviors to manage these symptoms (not sitting with their back to the door or yelling at people who sit too close). How might these behaviors be interpreted by staff who don't know that an individual has experienced a traumatic event?
3. Why might the individuals you serve not disclose a sexual assault?
4. In this video we are challenged to shift from thinking "what's wrong with them?" to "What happened to them?". How might this shift make a difference in responding to the individuals you work with? What can you do to help create a safer environment within your agency?
5. What would help you process your feelings and knowledge gained after viewing this video?



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Video #3 Discussion Questions

1. This video explains that being a safe person, in part, means being gentle and predictable. How can you become a safer person?
2. Sexual assault is not about sexual hygiene, consensual sex, or romance. However, if a person who has been sexually assaulted notices that you are uncomfortable talking about sexuality, they might be less likely to disclose the assault to you. How can you become more comfortable with the topic of human sexuality?
3. Are there cultural, religious, or other barriers for you in talking about sexuality?
4. How can your agency support you in creating a safer environment for survivors of sexual assault?
5. Part of creating a safer environment involves offering choices on a regular basis. What are some ways you can offer individual's choice on a day to day basis?
6. When a disclosure of sexual assault is made it is important to avoid asking questions beginning with "why". This can make the survivor feel that the assault was their fault and imply that they could have controlled the abuser's behavior, which is not true. The only person to blame for an assault is the abusive person. Can you think of questions that might be more helpful to ask a survivor? What do you think is harmful about asking a survivor "why" questions?
7. Remaining calm during a disclosure is important. What helps you to remain calm?
8. Has your comfort level with this topic changed after viewing this series of videos?



Supporting Survivors of Sexual Assault with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

How can the YWCA help us?

The YWCA West Central Michigan offers a range of services that respond to the issues of sexual violence. We are committed to tailoring services to meet the individual needs of each survivor. We offer:

Telephone Crisis Advocacy: **YWCA 24/7 Help Line (616) 454-9922**

- Trained Advocates are available to help callers on issues related to sexual violence, anytime, day or night. You do not need to identify yourself.
- Help with immediate safety planning for survivors of sexual assault.
- General referral information for area medical, legal, and counseling services, including the Nurse Examiner Program.
- Help with immediate problem solving, consultation, education and planning next steps.
- Caring support for survivors, family and care-givers.

In-person Advocacy Sessions

- Individual crisis counseling sessions are provided for sexual assault survivors at the YWCA, at home, or any safe meeting place.
- Support with advocacy within the legal, employment, medical, educational and housing systems.
- Develop long-term safety plans with survivors, family and staff.
- We can provide some financial support for transportation and client assistance to increase safety and access to the legal process.
- Arrange for ongoing counseling, if desired.
- Provide support and advocacy during the medical forensic examination through the Nurse Examiner Program.



Supporting Survivors of Sexual Assault with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

Individual Therapy

The YWCA offers individual and family counseling to help survivors, family members, guardians and staff heal from the assault.

Group Service

The YWCA can provide educational support groups for clients, and supportive consultation and training for staff, at your agency location or at the YWCA.

How do I get to the YWCA?



**YWCA West Central Michigan
25 Sheldon Blvd. SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49503**

Free parking for clients and visitors of the YWCA West Central Michigan is available in the lot directly behind our facility (on the corner of Weston and Division). Additional parking is available at city meters and in the Spectrum lot on the corner of Weston and Sheldon (entry off LaGrave).



Supporting Survivors of Sexual Assault with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

Driving Directions to the YWCA:

From South: US-131N to Cherry Street, Left on Division, Right on Sheldon Blvd SE

From North: US-131S to Market Ave SW, Right on Fulton, Right on Sheldon Blvd SE

From East: I-196W to College Ave NE, Left on College, Right on Fulton, Left on Sheldon Blvd SE

From West: I-196E to Market Ave SW, Right on Fulton, Right on Sheldon Blvd SE

Bus Stops near the YWCA

There are several bus stops within a short walking distance of the YWCA (25 Sheldon) including bus lines 1, 4, 14, 15 and the Silver Line. The following stops are within .2 miles of the YWCA:

- Fulton & Sheldon
- Division & Fulton
- Fulton Street & Ransom
- Division & Monroe Center
- Fulton & Louis

Transportation Assistance

If you need help getting to the YWCA, let the helpline staff know when you call to set up an appointment. Cab vouchers and bus tickets can be made available to you to get to the YWCA.



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What resources are there for the legal system?

The following resources can make it easier to work with the legal system and find needed help.

YWCA West Central Michigan – Legal Advocate

PHONE: 616-426-3727

The YWCA offers paralegal services, help working with the legal/court system, and can provide referrals to licensed attorneys if necessary.

Kent County Prosecutor's Office

PHONE: 616-632-6710

The Prosecutor's office protects the rights, safety, and security of Kent County residents through diligent efforts to prosecute criminal offenses in Kent County.

Legal Assistance Center

PHONE: 616-632-6000

If you are trying to solve basic legal problems in Kent County without an attorney, the Legal Assistance Center can help you help yourself. The Legal Assistance Center goal is to help you be informed, be prepared, and be heard.

Office for Victims of Crime

PHONE: 1-800-851-3420 **OR** 201-836-6998 TTY: 301-240-6310

OVC provides an online directory of Crime Victim Services, a resource designed to help service providers and individuals locate nonemergency crime victim service agencies in the United States and abroad.

Crime Victim Compensation

PHONE: 1-877-251-7373

Crime Victim Services can provide innocent victims and their families with up to \$25,000 in financial assistance for expenses accrued as a result of a violent crime. Through collaborative efforts with law enforcement,



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prosecutors, medical providers, funeral homes, advocates, and crime victim compensation, we can begin to help the victim put their life back together by assisting the victim with financial hardship.

[Victim Rights Law Center](#)

A nonprofit law center dedicated to serving the needs of rape and sexual assault victims. It offers free legal services to victims of rape and sexual assault.

[Michigan VINE](#)

PHONE: 1-800-770-7657 TTY: 1-866-847-1298

VINE, which stands for Victim Information and Notification Everyday, is a victim notification network that provides the most reliable information for custody status changes and criminal case information. VINELink can be accessed 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The VINE service provides information by phone, email, TTY, and text message where available.

[Adult Protective Services \(APS\)](#)

PHONE: 1-855-444-3911

Adult Protective Services investigators protect vulnerable adults from abuse, neglect and exploitation by coordinating with mental health, public health, law enforcement, the probate courts, the aging network, community groups and the general public.

[Child Protective Services \(CPS\)](#)

PHONE: 1-855-444-3911

Children's Protective Services (CPS) program is responsible for investigating allegations of child abuse and neglect. The Michigan Child Protection Law provides the framework for what CPS must do