



Disability & Healthy Relationships ECHO Summary

Date: 3/12/26

Topic: Disability & Abuse

Presenter: Alex Schiwal

Presentation Summary: The Disability and Healthy Relationships ECHO session, led by Alex Schiwal, focused on the intersection of disability and abuse. Alex highlighted that one in four adults in the U.S. has a disability, and three to four of them experience abuse in their lifetime. People with disabilities are more likely to be victims of violent crimes and are less likely to report those crimes. The session emphasized the importance of education, training, and accessible resources for professionals, caregivers, and individuals with disabilities. Participants shared strategies for improving abuse prevention and reporting, including collaboration, early intervention, and trauma-informed care.

Community Questions & Responses:

1. What ideas do you have for more effectively sharing information and education about healthy relationships and abuse prevention for people with disabilities?

- Educating guardians and caregivers
- Partnerships with organizations serving different populations (dv/crisis centers)
- I think we need to educate medical providers and other organizations like WIC (women infant children), HHS, teachers
- Maybe have disability abuse prevention education for families and parents with students who need 504 and IEPs in school. It would maybe catch the kiddos who wouldn't otherwise get the information.
- Health literacy, know more about things outside of their own small social groups
- starting from the basics: consent

a. What methods have worked for you in your state?

- Start early, prevention is key.
- Also a focus on preventing abuse by educating on self care and preventing caregiver burnout.
- Trying to understand what is working – education, self-advocacy,

b. What barriers do you see in your state specifically?

- Recruited students from other places, case managers who were trusted
- Speak with the students themselves, build trust (at student health



center)

- Message tailoring (geography, population, virtual)

2. How might someone's type of disability (cognitive, mental health, physical) influence their risk for abuse?

a. How can professionals use this knowledge to better support education and prevention?

- Individuals with cognitive, mental health disabilities are probably less likely to be believed and have their abusers prosecuted than the ones with only physical disabilities
- Our Deaf and hard of hearing student's had significant abuse concerns. We needed to speak separately to those groups in their language of choice.
- If people are taught in different styles depending on the learner, the different disabilities would need modification in the education in order to make it personal and applicable to the client.
- Lack of accessible services or interpreters can lead to isolation and inability to report abuse. Making sure we make resources accessible and allow for clients to have a safe space is critical.
- Lack of belief coming from lack of trust in their ability to accurately report their experience? or because IDD folks are assumed to be asexual? or because of presumptions of deviance? or all of the above?
- People being victims to their care providers

3. Given the fact that most cases of abuse of people with disabilities go unreported and/or are not prosecuted, how can professionals support and/or empower people with disabilities to feel like they are able to come forward with their stories or make a report?

- Understand all the steps of a reporting process so it can be explained clearly to others
 - a. How can we ensure that people with disabilities understand what is abuse, even from trusted individuals?**
 - b. What methods have helped you build trust with the individuals with disabilities you work with, in order to have potentially difficult conversations with them about abuse?**
 - Paramedic post-ER check in program

4. What other learning resources or trainings about abuse prevention do you use in your work?



- a. **What types of resources do you wish you could use (i.e., specific languages, learning formats, or content geared towards specific disabilities)?**
- [Reproductive Health National Training Center](#)
 - Elevatus, Friendship & Dating Program, and Mad Hatter Wellness are all great curricula we use for [TETONS](#)
 - [Utah State Office of Homeless Services](#)
 - [Your Sexual Health Toolkit](#)
 - Local health departments – check for resources
 - [Real Talk](#)
 - Extension offices