

PREVENTION

Individuals with disabilities are 2-4 times more likely to be physically or sexually assaulted than their peers – much more likely to be by someone they know, and more likely to be during daytime hours. Abuse in people with autism is usually not recognized, reported, investigated, or prosecuted.

WHAT IS THE PATHWAY TO VICTIMIZATION?

It is extremely important that parents, guardians, and professionals working with people with autism know the potential risk factors:

SOCIAL BIAS – People with autism are often treated as being less valuable than others, and may feel as if they are invisible

OPPORTUNITY – Abusers may believe that people with autism are easier to trick, bribe, or coerce. Offenders may see people with autism as “ideal” targets because of their difficulty identifying these incidents as inappropriate interactions. Also, people with autism tend to be more isolated in schools and in the community and sometimes require help using the toilet, bathing, and dressing from multiple caregivers, which can increase the risk for abuse.

LACK OF INFORMATION – People with autism are often not taught about personal safety and sexual education that could help them recognize abusive behaviors. People with autism are frequently trained to be compliant with requests and directives, which can limit their ability to say no or stop.

DESIRE TO BE SOCIALLY ACCEPTED – People with autism often struggle with social challenges and may see the relationship with the perpetrator as an opportunity to have the social relationships he/she desires.



DIFFICULTY TELLING ABOUT ABUSE – People with communication disabilities may have difficulty telling people what happened. When people do tell about abuse, it is often not believed, investigated, or prosecuted because of the individual’s disability

LACK OF AWARENESS – Parents, guardians, educators, and other providers often don’t realize that people with autism are at high risk for abuse and may not recognize signs of abuse. Changes in behavior (which are common after abuse) are often assumed to be related to the disability, rather than a symptom of abuse.

www.paautism.org/BeSafe