

Disability Services ASAP
(A Safety Awareness Program)

- People with disabilities are a very heterogeneous group. Each individual is very different in terms of skills and needs. Do not make assumptions about a person's abilities based on her/his appearance. Do not be afraid to ask the person what support they need from you.
- Keep things concrete when communicating with people with cognitive disabilities-do not use big words, abstract, or future-oriented techniques which require a lot of imagining. Ask "who," "what," or "when" questions. "How" and "why" questions may be more difficult to answer for a person with a cognitive disability. Break instructions into small steps/tasks. Individuals with cognitive disabilities are often limited in abstract thinking skills-it may work best to use pictures, drawings or dolls to demonstrate what you are talking about. Encourage the individual to ask questions. Ask if she or he understands and be sure that she or he is "with" you before moving on.
- Go slow in getting information out about the sexual abuse/assault incident(s). Remember that many individuals with disabilities have extremely limited knowledge of private parts, sexual activity, and have been told not to talk about it. They may feel very embarrassed and uncomfortable.
- Address the issue of guilt. Individuals who lack information about the body and "normal" sexual contact may experience guilt or shame. Guilt is often compounded by misinformation from parents and others about the sexual abuse incident(s).
- Work with the individual to increase the individual's knowledge about healthy sexuality including what it means to consent and what is involved in a healthy sexual relationship between two people.
- Include information and education on self-protection and assertiveness to reduce the risk of future victimization. This may include how to know when a situation is dangerous, how to say no to unwanted sexual activity, the importance of telling someone what happened, and individualized self-defense techniques.
- Involve parents, caregivers, partner, spouse, or family members if the survivor consents. They will need information about what to expect, how to help the individual with healing, and basic information about sexual abuse. They often have misconceptions about who is to blame and what the survivor should have or have not done.