

## What can I do?

As a family member or friend of someone with a disability, or as a service provider, there is much you can do to prevent or stop abuse, neglect, and exploitation. It boils down to three major steps:

- 1 **Educate yourself about these issues.** Visit APD's Zero Tolerance website, which goes into more detail and provides links to other resources that focus on safety and well-being.  
[www.apdcares.org/zero-tolerance](http://www.apdcares.org/zero-tolerance)
- 2 **Look for signs and symptoms.** When visiting the individual, pay attention to their physical condition and ask about their interactions with others. Note sudden changes in condition or behavior.



- 3 **Report abuse, neglect or exploitation when you suspect it.** Florida law requires that anyone who knows or suspects that a child or an adult with a disability is being abused, neglected, or exploited must report that information. Do it right away, before the scam artists get away or the unscrupulous caregivers cover their tracks. To report suspected abuse, neglect, or exploitation, do the following:
  - If the person's life or health is in immediate danger, call **911**. Otherwise,
  - Call the Florida Abuse Hotline toll-free at **1-800-96-ABUSE (1-800-962-2873)**, file a report online <https://reportabuse.dcf.state.fl.us> or fax a statement to **1-800-914-0004**.

You can remain anonymous if you wish. It is important that you contact the Abuse Hotline or 911 as soon as possible if you think that an individual with a disability is being abused, neglected, or exploited. Your actions may save a life or help protect the health, safety, and welfare of people who may not be able to protect themselves.

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### Agency Contact Information

Agency for Persons with Disabilities  
1-866-APD-CARES (1-866-273-2273)  
(850) 488-4257  
[www.apdcares.org](http://www.apdcares.org)

# ZERO TOLERANCE

ENDING THE ABUSE, NEGLECT, AND  
EXPLOITATION OF PEOPLE WITH  
DISABILITIES



agency for persons with disabilities  
State of Florida

**Serving Floridians with  
Developmental Disabilities**

## What is Zero Tolerance?

The Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) developed its Zero Tolerance initiative to end abuse, neglect, and exploitation of people with disabilities by their caregivers. Sadly, persons with disabilities are much more likely to be abused, neglected, or exploited than the general population. Many of these individuals are not able to say that they are being mistreated, so it is important to pay attention to the warning signs that may be present. This brochure will help you spot these crimes and tell you what to do about them.



## What is abuse?

Abuse includes physical harm caused by others, sexual assault, and verbal or psychological mistreatment. Someone who has been abused may have some of these symptoms:

- Bruises, burns, cuts, broken bones, other physical harm
- Vaginal or rectal pain, frequent urinary tract infections, painful urination, other signs of sexual activity
- Incontinence in someone who was previously toilet-trained
- Sudden difficulty walking or sitting
- Fear of a particular person or place
- Nightmares or disrupted sleep patterns
- Sudden or unexplained changes in behavior or physical condition

## What is neglect?

People with disabilities are neglected when they do not get the care needed to keep them healthy and safe. The signs of neglect may include:

- Bedsores
- Deteriorating physical appearance
- Dehydration
- Poor or improper hygiene
- Unexplained weight loss
- Lack of necessary adaptive aids, such as eyeglasses, walkers, or communication devices
- Lack of prescribed medications or medical care



## What is exploitation?

Exploitation involves the theft of the individual's money or property, embezzlement, and other forms of financial fraud. The signs of exploitation may include:

- Sudden decrease in bank account balances
- Larger or more frequent withdrawals than usual
- Problems paying bills or buying necessities
- Changes in wills or other financial documents
- The person acts very secretly
- Unexplained disappearance of money or possessions
- Late or unpaid bills despite adequate funds