



Margaret M. O'Neill Buildin2nd Floor  
410 Federal Street - Suite 2 Dover, Delaware 19901  
Phone: 302.739.3333 ♦ Fax: 302.739.2015 ♦ Website: [www.ddc.delaware.gov](http://www.ddc.delaware.gov)

## Protection from Mistreatment Position Statement

**People with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities must be free from abuse, neglect, or any kind of mistreatment.**

### Words to Know

**Abuse** is when someone hurts you or treats you very badly.

**Emotional abuse** is when someone says or does things to make you feel really bad about yourself. They might yell, insult you, or try to control your feelings.

**Exploitation** means when someone unfairly uses you for their own benefit. They might take advantage of you or use you in a way that is not right or fair.

**Financial abuse** is when someone controls or takes your money or belongings without your permission or with your permission when the person knows you do not understand how it will affect you.

**Isolated** means when you are all alone, without anyone around.

**Mistreatment** is when someone treats you in a way that is unkind or harmful. They might not hurt you physically, but they are not treating you well.

**Neglect** is when someone does not take care of you or give you the things you need, like food, shelter, or love.

**Physical abuse** is when someone hurts your body on purpose.

**Protect** means to keep someone safe from harm or danger.

**Public Policy** means the laws, rules, and decisions governments make.

**Recovery** means getting better or healing from something. When someone is recovering, they are working on becoming healthier and happier after a tough time or an illness.

**Sexual abuse** is when someone does something sexual to you without your permission.

**Trauma-Informed Care** means that when people like doctors, teachers, or counselors are trying to help others, they remember that the person they are helping might have been through difficult or hurtful experiences in the past. They are careful and understanding to avoid making things worse.

After learning that people with disabilities are much more likely to be victims of abuse than people without disabilities (data shows 85% more likely), the Delaware Developmental Disabilities Council and the Division of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDDS) began the Stop the Abuse Now Delaware (STAND) project in 2014. A trainer from DDDS trains people with disabilities using the STAND training program. People who have been trained then lead their own training sessions and support groups. STAND training focuses on “before, during, and after” abuse. “Before” focuses on how to avoid being a victim. “During” focuses on surviving abuse and writing down information to report later. “After” focuses on trauma-informed care and recovery. The STAND training covers physical, sexual, emotional, and financial abuse.

## **Issue**

Abuse, neglect, mistreatment, and exploitation of people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (I/DD) happens too often. Mistreatment often happens when people are isolated.

People who do not live with their family are at are at risk of mistreatment. This is true no matter where their home is or how many people they live with.

Some families do not have the information or help they need to take care of their family members with I/DD. As a result, a few may mistreat their family members. Many more families do not get the help they need to keep their loved one safe from harm by other people. When families believe something bad happened, they often do not have the support they need to make sure a serious investigation is done and the people responsible are punished.

Federal and state laws may not be enough to protect people. Agencies that are supposed to protect children and adults do not always do their jobs well, which makes the problem worse. People like the police, emergency room staff, and protective service workers need to learn how to help people with I/DD be safe without doing things that go

against their rights. Also, people with I/DD may not have learned how to protect themselves from mistreatment.

## **Position**

Protecting all people with I/DD from harm is an important part of public policy in the United States. It is the right thing to do, and everyone who is a part of a person's life must help with that. At the same time, people have a right to take risks and make their own choices.

Everyone with I/DD should be taught about their rights in ways they can understand. This includes the right to be safe and not treated badly. They should learn about mistreatment and where it might come from. They should know how to stay safe, tell the right people if something bad happens, and show that it really did happen.

When children or adults with I/DD must leave their families' homes to stay safe from harm, they should live in small homes in the community, not in institutions. Putting people with I/DD in places separate from everyone else does not keep them safe. One of the best ways to keep people with I/DD safe is for them to have friends and be part of their community, so people know and look out for them.

## **Children**

In our country, we usually think children are safest with their birth, adoptive, or foster family. To make sure families can protect their children, they should be able to get help easily from:

- Family support services. Family services provide information, training, and other support that help families meet the needs of their children.
- Groups that give parents and other family members information, help them find what they need, and support them.
- Advocacy, law enforcement, and courts that punish people who did something wrong.

If a family cannot protect their child for any reason, there should be federal, state, and local services and money in place to help the child and sometimes the family.

When the government steps in to help, they should respect the family's rights and privacy as much as possible while making sure the child is safe from harm. Government must protect children from abuse.

## Adults

The best way to keep an adult safe usually involves the support of family, community, and friends. But sometimes, Adult Protective Services or advocacy groups should help too. Adult Protective Services is a government agency that works to make sure adults with disabilities and others are not abused, neglected, or exploited. Advocacy groups work with people with disabilities and their families to make sure their rights are respected, they are treated well, and they get the support they need.

Just like with children, the law should be used to keep adults with I/DD safe from harm. All adults have the right to make choices that do not put them at great risk- physically, emotionally, mentally, and financially. The law must respect that.

---

Revised: January 2024