Health and Welfare Alert
Preventing Physical Abuse #22-7-13

Purpose

The purpose of this Alert is to provide critical information to caregivers on physical abuse prevention. People with developmental disabilities are at a high risk for physical abuse because they need physical assistance and support. Those providing care can help reduce risks, report allegations timely, and ensure all at risk are safe. This Alert will provide some signs that may indicate a person is being abused and what you can do to help.

All DD Employees are required to be trained, annually, on identification and reporting of Major Unusual Incidents and Unusual Incidents prior to unsupervised contact. This training includes the review of any Health and Welfare Alerts released since the previous calendar year’s training.

For questions / comments, please contact the MUI/Registry Unit at (614) 995-3810.

The MUI Rule (O.A.C 5123:2-17-02) defines “Physical abuse” as the use of physical force that can reasonably be expected to result in physical harm or serious physical harm as those terms are defined in section 2901.01 of the Revised Code. Such force may include, but is not limited to, hitting, slapping, pushing, or throwing objects at an individual.

Last year, there were 1469 reported allegations of physical abuse. Of those allegations, 373 (25%) were substantiated based on a preponderance level (it was more likely than not to that abuse occurred). Fortunately, in 37% of the incidents, the individuals suffered no injuries and in 44% of the incidents, there was minor injury. Moderate and serious injuries comprised 19% of abuse related injuries.

Those responsible for the abuse were paid providers (29%); family members (26%); unknown attacker (15%); friends (14%) and others known acquaintances (14%). Guardians (non-family members) and payees accounted for 1% each.

Individuals with a developmental disability are at greater risk for abuse because they depend on others for physical assistance and support. Services are often provided in isolation or where oversight is limited. At first, the individual may not understand what is happening and may have a hard time making others understand that they have been abused. That is why timely reporting of suspected abuse is so important. At times, allegations can be difficult to prove when there are no physical injuries and the victim has problems communicating what occurred. However, others around that individual may notice signs and can help stop the abuse!
How can you tell if someone is being abused?

- The person may become depressed
- Unexplained burns, bites, bruises, broken bones, or black eyes
- Other untreated injuries
- The victim may act very upset for a long time
- Lose skills or confidence
- Change their behavior or mood
- Seem frightened of certain people or situations
- Become violent
- Problems at work
- Not want to talk to anyone
- Refuse to go places where the abuser is (home, work, family visit)

Physical Abuse Prevention:

1. Screen your employees prior to hiring. Check references and any gaps in employment. Be sure to follow all background check requirements.
2. Post numbers to call for help. Make sure everyone (staff, individuals, and families) know who to call to get help.
3. Observe how employees interact. Ongoing training and communication is important. Talk about the expectations about how people should be treated using the Positive Culture Initiative as a guide.
4. Visit all places individuals are receiving services.
5. Ensure staff are given tools to do their job
6. Be mindful of staff who are working excessive hours and the impact.
7. As a supervisor, do unannounced visits. Welcome family and friends to do the same if agreeable to individual.

Steps to Take

- Get the individual appropriate medical attention.
- Take immediate action to protect the person from further assault
- Report immediately to law enforcement or CSB
- Report to the County Board immediately but within 4 hours
- Remember to NOT infer blame on the victim.
- Emotionally support the alleged victim
- Remember to refer the individual for counseling and victim’s assistance as appropriate.
- Notify DODD MUI Unit if the alleged PPI is a County Board Employee.

The law says certain people MUST make a report if they have good reason to believe that abuse or neglect has happened; this is called mandated reporting. They include: DD Personnel, Doctors, nurses and other healthcare providers, mental health professionals, counselors, social workers, teachers and others.