



Health & Safety Alert #22-2-04

Preventing Physical Abuse

The purpose of this alert is to provide information to assist agencies in preventing physical abuse.

Prevention of Physical Abuse

Physical abuse allegations represent close to 10 percent of all Major Unusual Incidents in Ohio. Potential for abuse increases where you have people who must depend upon others for physical assistance and support. Services are often provided in isolation where oversight is limited, and there may not be others present that witnessed the abuse. Allegations are often difficult to prove where there may not be physical injuries, and the victim has problems communicating what occurred.

Although preventing abuse is difficult, there are actions that employers can take to reduce the likelihood of abuse.

- 1) *Screen your employees prior to hiring.* Check references of previous employers and check any gaps with employment. Be sure to conduct your background checks. Although it may take more time in the hiring process, it will certainly save time and energy in the long run.
- 2) *Observe how your employees interact with consumers.* Being “gruff” may be someone’s personality, but it is not acceptable when interacting with others. Watch for people who are easily angered or who might be experiencing personal hardships. Be mindful of employees who always want to control the situation or control what the consumer does. This staff behavior often leads to abusive situations.
- 3) *Ensure that your staff are given the tools to do their job.* Ongoing training and communication are so important. Training is not enough. Staff must be able to apply what they have learned. The standard on how people are treated needs to be clear to all who work in the agency. Talking about difficult situations with agency supervisors and administrators should be encouraged. Remember, if direct support staff are not provided with solutions to everyday problems they face, they will come up with their own. Agencies should consider ways for staff to “step back” from a situation when they feel they are losing control.
- 4) *Be mindful of staff who are regularly working excessive hours,* or are not relieved on time, or in situations where staffing numbers are low. This can be a source of frustration or anger that gets directed towards consumers.
- 5) *Supervisors should be taught good skills in communicating and confronting improper situations.* Supervisors should conduct “drop in visits” frequently. Are staff applying the standards for how people are to be treated?

- 6) *Regular training, along with supervisors checking staffs' application of this training* needs to occur for recognizing reporting and preventing abuse.
- 7) *Freedom to report must be embraced by the agency.* Staff should never feel punished for honest reporting.
- 8) *Encourage routine family or friend involvement* in the lives of the individuals.
- 9) *It is critical for direct service employees to know and be able to identify signs and symptoms of abuse* in order to obtain immediate assistance for the consumer. When abuse occurs, remember to take care of not only the physical injuries, but also the emotional injuries that occur. Ensure the person is safe from future harm.

Reminder:

Allegations of abuse require immediate reporting by Rule to the County Board of MRDD, MUI Contact person. Unreasonably failing to make a report where the employee knew or should have known that the failure would result in a substantial risk of harm, may result in placement on the Abuser Registry.

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

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