



Network Of Victim Assistance

*Reclaiming Dignity,  
Building Strength*

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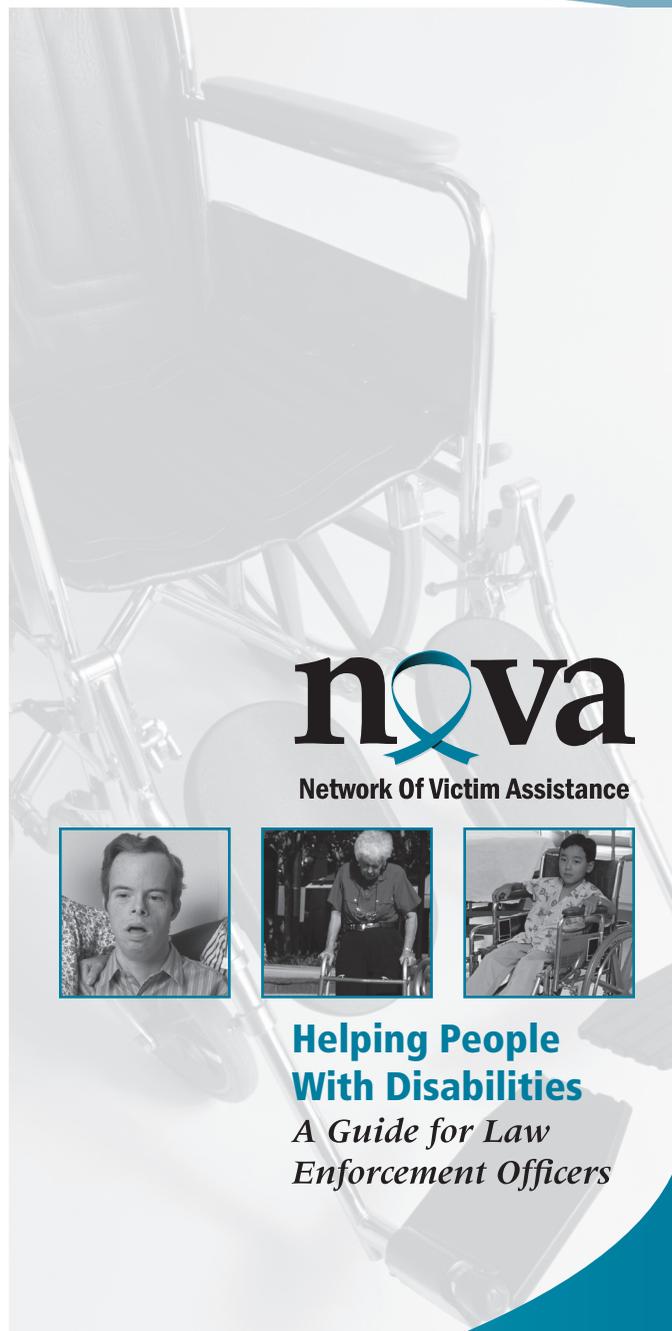
[www.novabucks.org](http://www.novabucks.org)



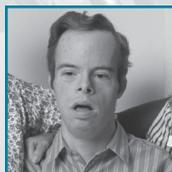
A Member Agency –  
United Way of Bucks County



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Network Of Victim Assistance



## Helping People With Disabilities

*A Guide for Law  
Enforcement Officers*

## Dealing with Abuse

*Like any crime victim, a person with a disability who is a victim of physical assault or other crime may feel especially powerless, vulnerable and afraid. Their disability may complicate their ability to reveal the abuse in that their abuser could very well be a caregiver or family member, or they may not even have the mental capability to recognize that they have been abused. It is up to the first response team to help them feel more comfortable.*

*The purpose of this guide is to provide some communication tips and resource information to first response personnel so they can best help people with disabilities who have been the victims of crime.*

## Setting the Stage for Good Communication

As you know, people with disabilities are people first. Cultural stereotypes of persons with disabilities need to be put aside because they will interfere with your efforts to make the victim comfortable. Victims with disabilities should be treated in an age appropriate manner and with dignity. Not all disabilities are mental, nor does a disability necessarily indicate an inability to hear. Victims with disabilities are uncomfortable with a patronizing or condescending attitude, or even unapproved assistance, but will respond well if they are asked first if there is any assistance that would make communication easier.

To conduct an effective interview, you should find out the nature of the victim's disability first, and how that might compromise his or her ability to respond. Victims with disabilities often try to hide the abuse or they may not even be aware that they have been victimized. Many factors increase the vulnerability of this population – a medical condition, fear of authority, communication difficulties. Therefore, it is important that you prepare mentally for the interview beforehand, including the questions you need to ask.

## Other specific communication tips include:

- **Always remind the victim that it was not their fault.**
- Get to know the communicating abilities of your victim. **Ask for the victim to show you how they communicate.**
- **Draw on your own verbal and nonverbal skills for engaging the victim.** Be aware of your own and other's body language cues.
- **Speak directly to the person** with a disability instead of through a third party.
- **Maintain eye contact at all times.** Never talk about the person as if he/she is not there.
- **Speak in a normal tone of voice** unless the person is hard of hearing. (Speaking louder may or may not be more effective.)
- **Be patient and thorough.** It may take extra time for someone with a disability to say, do, or show you something.
- **Clarify if you don't understand.** Have the person repeat him or herself. A clear concise statement with all of the facts is better than having multiple statements.
- Establish **early** in the interview that the victim **knows what "telling the truth" means.**
- If this is a victim of sexual assault, **establish a clear understanding of how the individual understands sexuality.** In addition, be aware of your own attitudes about sexuality and disability. A person with a disability can, and may, have a sex life.

Also, as a police officer you understand that making a victim aware of victims services is required by law. This is especially important when interacting with a victim who has a disability. Remember to discuss victim's services with the person, and seriously consider having a victim's advocate present during an interview.

## Did You Know?

- People with disabilities are **4 times** more likely to be victimized, and are more likely to be repeatedly victimized.
- Children with any kind of disability are more than **twice as likely** as children without disabilities to be physically abused and **almost twice as likely** to be sexually abused.



## Emergency Resources

### Network of Victim Assistance

Offers a victim advocate trained to assist with people with disabilities, crisis counseling, short term counseling, and personal empowerment training for people with disabilities.

**24 Hour Hotline: 1-800-675-6900**

**TTY: 215-348-2963**

**www.novabucks.org**

### A Woman's Place

Offers short-term shelter for people in domestic and family violent relationships.

**24 Hour Hotline: 1-800-220-8116**

### Deaf-Hearing Communication Center

Offers legal advocacy, systems advocacy, 24-hour emergency interpreter services.

**610-604-0452 • 610-604-0450**

### Pennsylvania Client Assistance Program

CAP is an advocacy program for people with disabilities administered by the Center for Disability Law & Policy. CAP helps people who are seeking services from the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, Blindness and Visual Services, Centers for Independent Living and other programs funded under federal law.

**Toll Free: 1-888-745-CDLP**

**Voice/TDD: 215-557-7112**

### The American Red Cross

Offers emergency shelter services.

**Homeless Hotline: 1-800-810-4434**

**Lower Bucks County: 215-949-1727**

**Upper Bucks County: 215-348-8161**

### Pennsylvania Protection and Advocacy

Pennsylvania Protection and Advocacy, Inc. is a federally funded, nonprofit agency responsible for providing protection and advocacy services to people with disabilities.

**Toll Free: 800-692-7443**

**TTY: 877-375-7139**

### Freedom Valley Disability Center

Offers individual and systems advocacy, referrals on housing and employment, peer counseling and independent living skills training.

**1-800-427-4754**

### Bucks County Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation

Responsible for monitoring the services provided to people with disabilities by social service agencies in Bucks County.

**215-442-0760**

### Bucks County Intermediate Unit #22

Offers assistance with facilitated communication.

**215-346-2940**

### Lenape Valley Crisis Center

Offers crisis counseling for mental health consumers who are a harm to themselves or someone else in Central Bucks County

**24 Hour Counseling: 215-785-9765**

**215-345-5327**

### Pennel Mental Health Center

Provides outpatient services, partial hospitalization, residential rehabilitation services, and intensive case management to Mental Health and Mental retardation consumers.

**Lower Bucks County: 215-752-1541**

### Penn Foundation, Inc.

Offers mental, emotional and chemical dependency services, individual and family counseling, psychiatric medication and medication monitoring, social rehabilitation, case management, residential services, and partial hospitalization.

**Upper Bucks County: 215-217-6522**

## Emergency Food

### Doylestown Area FISH

Crisis organization supplying food, lodging and transportation to those in need on a temporary basis.

**24 Hour Hotline 215-348-7172**

### Bristol Borough Community Action Group, Inc.

Emergency food pantry, Helping Hand Pantry to help Philadelphia Suburban Water Co.'s clients with water bills.

**215-785-3296**

### Bucks County Housing Group

Offers emergency shelter for families at four locations; bridge and transitional housing; permanent rental housing at 3 locations. Additionally, they have an emergency food pantry.

**215-598-3566**

### Pennridge FISH Organization, Inc.

Provides food, paper and soap products, used clothing. Helps with rent, utility bills, fuel oil and overnight housing.

**215-257-7616 • 215-536-0420**

## Financial Services

### Bucks County Assistance Office

Provides financial assistance, nursing home assistance, medical assistance, food stamps, energy assistance, information and referral for social services.

**Bristol: 215-781-3300**

**Warminster: 215-443-3200**

### Bucks Montgomery Center for Human Services

Emergency food assistance and case management services are provided for housing, financial and employment related problems.

**215-323-9935**

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