1800RESPECT

NATIONAL SEXUAL ASSAULT, DOMESTIC
FAMILY VIOLENCE COUNSELLING SERVICE

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Guidelines for using specialist resources with women with disabilities who have experienced violence and abuse:

A resource to support access and inclusion

1800RESPECT is available for frontline workers and people with disability for information, referral and counselling.

1800RESPECT counsellors are trained in responding to people with disability and frontline workers.

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This document is for staff who work in sexual assault, domestic or family violence support services with a key role in supporting women with disabilities who experience violence and abuse.

BACKGROUND

Women with disabilities experience violence and abuse at higher rates than other groups of people and other women[1]. Women with disabilities access Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence and Family Violence (SADFV) services for counselling and support about their experiences and support for safety.

1800RESPECT provides counselling, information, and referrals via telephone or web chat, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to anyone impacted by violence and abuse.

Currently, the SADFV service sector in Australia is under pressure to provide services to an ever-increasing number of women whose experiences reflect greater complexity. Experiences of disability are part of this complexity.

Previous research by Women with Disabilities Australia (WWDA) and research commissioned by Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) have called for approaches that enable access to services for women with disabilities. This work focused on supporting services to develop capacity to address access and inclusion and to understand experiences of what access and inclusion means from the perspective of women with disabilities. This includes that services be approachable, acceptable, appropriate, available and affordable[1].

The guidelines are intended to be a quick reference document for frontline workers who will be using the Disability Support Toolkit resources. It is likely these workers will have existing knowledge of the challenges faced by women with disability so we have not included a lot of information in this regard. However, there are links in the Guidelines to reports that provide further context and background.

These guidelines are part of a larger research report, which forms part of the Disability Support Toolkit. Please contact 1800RESPECT to request a copy of the report.

[1] Dyson, S, Frawley, P & Robinson, S 2017, "Whatever it takes": Access for women with disabilities to domestic and domestic violence services: Final report (ANROWS Horizons, 05/2017), Sydney: ANROWS.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF HOW THESE GUIDELINES WERE DEVELOPED

10 SADFV services across Australia were engaged in the research that informed the development of these guidelines. They completed a survey that asked about their current practices using specialist resources to inform their work with women with a disability, and about their overall approaches to working with women with disabilities.

Focus groups were held with each site up to three times to further explore how they would use or had used the set of specialist resources that are the focus of these guidelines: Sunny - an application to assist with identifying violence and abuse; Putting it into Practice – a poster for supporting access and inclusion of women with disabilities in SADV services and 'Learn about violence and abuse' - a series of Easy English books.

The project was undertaken in consultation with the 1800RESPECT Disability Pathways Project and was evaluated as part of the ANROWS action research evaluation of the body of work being undertaken through the 1800RESPECT Disability Pathways Project.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR WORKING WITH WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES

The specialist resources in these guidelines are intended to be used by SADFV services alongside other resources and approaches that services currently use to support women with disabilities.

The following principles address broader issues that need to be considered for enabling women with disabilities to engage with the supports and services offered by SADFV services.

"We provide space for rapport-building and relationship-building so that we can communicate in a way that we can all understand each other, then we establish a strong relationship with that person." - SADFV worker.

Engaging with women with disabilities

Engaging with women with disabilities in SADFV services can be challenging for services that have minimal experience working with women with disabilities. Some SADFV services have staff with extensive experience in these services and working with women with disabilities. Some SADFV services have also engaged in disability awareness training that assists in developing access and inclusion with women with disabilities. Women with disability are diverse and require a tailored approach to meet their needs, disability type and general preferences. Women with disability are the experts in their own story and needs.

Some general approaches that can support positive engagement with women with disabilities include:
- Guidance for the woman to tell you about herself in her own words
- Build rapport which might take some time
- Use videos and stories
- Use a 'teach-back' approach, eg: "Did I explain that well enough for you?"
- Use case studies, which include a variety of case examples.

Some women may want to invite a support worker to support them in their engagement with the SADFV service. Negotiate this, taking into consideration the need for confidentiality and privacy.

Language

Communication modes and approaches used with women with disabilities should be tailored to each woman's experiences and identity. Communication should be accessible using specific language or communication approaches, this can include arranging and using interpreters for women who use AUSLAN (Australian Sign Language) and ensuring communication aids are able to be used for women who use Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC).

A key principle is to use simple, yet not over- simplified, factual language that is consistent with the language and communication that the woman with a disability uses, can relate to and access. This should include using the words and phrases that the woman you are working with already uses, and avoid jargon and abstract concepts.

Once a woman identifies experiences of violence and abuse (maybe for the first time), they will be highly distressed. Workers need to have the time and space to work with the woman and where appropriate develop safety plans as a priority.

USING SPECIALIST RESOURCES TO SUPPORT ACCESS AND INCLUSION

'One size does not fit all' poster

'One size does not fit all' is a poster that was developed from the research project 'Whatever it takes: access for women with disabilities to domestic and family violence services' . It is available for downloading from the ANROWS website. The poster was co-developed with women with disabilities. It translates findings from the research to be accessible for SADFV services to develop their knowledge and practice for improving access for women with disabilities. This poster is for people with disability, managers and staff working with people with disability.

Guidelines for using the 'One size does not fit all' poster

- Invite women with disabilities to co-facilitate training using the poster
- Give a copy of the poster to women with disabilities so they can use it in advocacy work they are doing to promote women's safety and access and inclusion
- Hang the poster in 'high-traffic' areas (tea rooms/waiting rooms) for a wide spread audience
- Ensure staff have the interactive PDF on their computers so they can access it and the additional resources available with the interactive poster
- Use in multidisciplinary team meetings, when referring women to other services, in workshops and training with other services. Use the poster in training with boards and committees of management for developing access and inclusion plans.

The interactive version has links to the 'Whatever it takes' reports, and other resources that services can use to be accessible and inclusive for women with disabilities. These resources include information on: understanding what makes services accessible, how to involve women with disabilities in services, how services can work together to support women, and how to collect and use information to develop advocacy.

Sunny app: an application to assist with identifying violence and abuse

The Sunny app ('Sunny') was developed by 1800RESPECT in collaboration with Women with Disability Australia in 2017. Sunny is an application for phones and tablets that provides information and support for people with disabilities who are victims of violence and abuse. Sunny was designed and developed in consultation with women with disabilities to maximise accessibility and usability. Sunny is designed to assist women with disabilities to report their experience, learn about violence and rights, and know where to go for further support. Sunny has a library of stories that have been developed to depict women with disabilities' experiences which can assist women to understand their own experience.

Sunny is screen-reader accessible, compliant to level AAA of the Web Content Accessibility guidelines 2.0 and free to download from any smart phone or tablet application store.

A key safety feature of Sunny is the two factor opening for discretion, in which the application first shows a generic weather application, then opens into the recognisable application after clicking the indiscreet 'Show Sunny' button.

Guidelines for using the Sunny app

- Be familiar with the features of Sunny so that you can guide clients through its use
- Talk through and demonstrate Sunny step by step
- Download on crisis response phones alongside other useful information and phone numbers
- The information on Sunny is consistent with the 1800RESPECT Easy English books. Use these books with Sunny to reinforce safety messages
- Use in conversations about safety planning
- Make sure that women are safe to use Sunny if they have it on their own phone
- Although it uses Easy English principles, Sunny can be useful for women who do not identify with having a disability but may be experiencing memory/cognitive issues associated with their experience of violence and abuse
- The language used in Sunny can be useful for women who have not yet found words to describe their experience. There is a feature that enables a woman to 'tell her story'
- Introduce and promote Sunny when referring women to other services or those you are working in collaboration with to support women with disabilities
- Sunny can be used in one-on-one first response situations, eg: when a woman presents at hospital
- When using Sunny in one-on-one work with woman, make a plan for the next step if they disclose additional experiences of violence and abuse
- Sunny is most accessible for women who are technologically savvy and own a smartphone or tablet
- Care should be taken when using Sunny on a phone if women's phones are monitored or controlled by another person, such as a perpetrator
- While Sunny can be used with other women, it is primarily designed for women with disabilities. Ensure the women you are using Sunny with identify with and are happy to use resources that are designed for women with disabilities.

"Because [our support is] on the phone, we only have a short period of time so it's around that, especially if they disengage too, we know that they can use Sunny to plan their safety."
- SADFV worker.

Using Sunny safely

Electronic resources require a level of technology literacy and awareness to use them safely and meaningfully. Factors that a user should be aware of include:

- whether there are onlookers around and what they can see
- data sharing
- phone sharing
- control of phone use
- issues of confidentiality with iCloud platforms
- volume/audio features.

It is important to combine broader training about how to use electronic resources safely with the targeted information about safety on the Sunny app, 'Using Sunny Safely'.

The feature 'Using Sunny Safely' can also be useful in setting a safety plan with women with disabilities. Phone applications and websites can be useful to talk about 'what not to do' or to talk through scenarios about 'using technology differently' and focus on safety on media/electronic usage. It is also important to consider the way some perpetrators of violence can hold and control information from women with disabilities as a form of, or connected to violence and abuse. Also electronic media that has storage features may be used as evidence in legal cases which needs to be considered when thinking about use of electronic resources like 'Sunny'. However, Sunny does not have the capabilities to store and hold information.

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1800RESPECT Easy English books:

Book 1: Learn about violence and abuse
Book 2: Learn about rights
Book 3: Where violence happens and who can do violence

In 2019, 1800RESPECT co-developed a set of 3 Easy English books about violence and abuse with women with disabilities.

Book 1 is titled 'Learn about violence and abuse', book 2 'Learn about rights' and book 3 'Where violence happens and who can do violence'.

The 1800RESPECT Easy English books are available from the Disability Support Toolkit on the 1800RESPECT website and can also be accessed via the WWDA Our Site website.

Together the 3 books provide the reader with a comprehensive overview of information about violence and abuse. This information is related using scenarios about rights in relationships. and rights to safety and respect. The books also provide information about where violence and abuse can occur and who can perpetrate violence. Presented in an Easy English format with words and corresponding pictures, these resources are designed to be accessible for people who might find complex language harder to read, comprehend or use.

Generally, Easy English combines images alongside text. Up to 44% of Australian adults find it difficult to read and write[2]. Easy English is widely used in the disability field as best practice for written information (Scope Australia n.d). Typically the images are directional and correspond to the wording. Images need to be diverse and portray characteristics which are relatable including gender, sexuality and culture.

Easy English resources can also be useful for developing a 'language' for the woman to use when talking about her experiences of violence and abuse. They can be particularly accessible in one-on-one conversations with women with disabilities because they can be read aloud by the worker to explain complex information in a more accessible but age appropriate way, or as a way of focusing discussions on key messages.

Guidelines for using the 1800RESPECT Easy English books

- Use the books to support your conversations with women with disabilities to understand their experiences of violence and abuse
- Choose the books if the woman indicates she is familiar with using Easy English resources
- Be very familiar with the content of the books so you can judge the suitability of using them with the women you work with, this includes age, sexuality, culture and language
- The information in the books is consistent with the Sunny app, you could use these together or show the women you are working with how to access the information that is in the books on the Sunny app
- The books are large (A4 size) so may not be accessible or easy for women to use. It is important to consider this if women you are working with do not want other people to know they are accessing information about violence and abuse. Be sure the books can be used privately
- Share the books with other services where you are referring with women with disabilities to. This will support consistent messaging
- Using the books can help focus a conversation if the women you are working with are finding it hard to communicate their experiences, feeling or articulate questions
- Use the books at a pace that works with the individual women you are working with, everyone will need a different pace. this might mean reading through sections at a time, flicking through the book and finding the most relevant sections or sometimes reading through the whole book at once,
- The books can be useful for carers, advocates or other support people. Ask women with disabilities if it is okay to give a copy of the book to their support person
- The books could be used for staff professional development in how to use Easy English in their work with women with disabilities.

- Sexual violence is when people
- Make you do sex when you do not want to
- Touch your body when you do not want them to.

ACCESSING INFORMATION

Using information to support women with disabilities

There are many websites available that provide information that women with disabilities might need across a wide range of areas of their lives. These are often government, disability advocacy or disability services sites. It can be difficult to know whether this information is going to be accessible for women with disabilities and often gender is not considered on these sites.

Women with Disabilities Australia (WWDA) co-developed the website Our Site in consultation with women with disabilities and maintain this site. This virtual information centre aims to address the gap in available online information which is inclusive and accessible for women and girls with disability and is co-developed with women with disabilities. Use the Our Site website to find information about rights, leadership, education, health services and care, sexuality and sexual health and safety from violence and abuse. There is also a library of stories from women with disabilities.

Thank you to everyone involved in the development of these guidelines.

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References:
[1] Frawley, P., Wellington, M., O'Shea, A., McAurthur, G., Plunkett, K & Stokoe, L. (2020). "Putting it into Practice": Guidelines for using Specialist Resources to support women and girls with disabilities who have experiences violence and abuse. Geelong: Deakin University

[2] https://www.scopeaust.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Plain-Language-fact-sheet_Accessible.pdf

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