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## Factors Contributing to Increased Risk of Sexual Assault for People with Disabilities

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- **Perceived Vulnerability:** Perpetrators target individuals who they think will be unable to tell anyone or will not be believed if they tell anyone.
- **Learned Compliance:** Many individuals with disabilities are dependent on others to provide personal care (bathing, toileting, dressing, etc.). The intimate nature of this care coupled with the inherent power difference that results between the caregiver and the care receiver makes a person susceptible to abuse. Individuals with disabilities have been socialized to comply with the instructions of "those in charge". If the person in charge is sexually abusing her/him, this learned compliance will undermine a person's power to seek protection or support.
- **Isolation:** People with disabilities are often segregated from the general public in education, employment, and/or housing, which limits their participation in common social settings. This isolation increases an individual's dependence on family members, service providers, peers, or other people who are involved in their lives. Perpetrators take advantage of this in order to maintain power and control over a victim and sexually abuse her/him.
- **Education:** People with disabilities are often not educated about healthy relationships, healthy sexuality, appropriate boundaries, correct names for body parts, sexual abuse, legal rights, and individual rights, such as, the right to live free from violence. If a person does not understand what is healthy and what is abusive, or what options are available when they are assaulted, it can be difficult to prevent abuse and seek services or support.

Information for this handout was provided by the  
Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault  
[www.wcasa.org](http://www.wcasa.org)