

# 10 Facts Victim Service Providers Need to Know

*When Serving & Protecting People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD)*



- 1. People with I/DD in particular face the highest risk of being victimized.** The fact is people with disabilities are more likely to be victims of crime than people without disabilities, and according to data from the [National Crime Victim Survey](#)<sup>1</sup> people with cognitive disabilities, including people with I/DD, face the highest risk of victimization. (See *Cycle of Victimization Chart*)
- 2. People with I/DD share common characteristics or challenges that place them at heightened risk of victimization.** VSPs should be aware that people with I/DD may:
  - Be less likely or able to report victimization
  - Be targeted for victimization due to having a disability
  - Think that how they have been treated is normal and not realize the victimization is a crime
  - Think the perpetrator is a “friend”
  - Be unaware of how serious or dangerous the situation is
  - Have very few ways to get help, get to a safe place or obtain victim services or counseling
- 3. Victims with I/DD face significant barriers to obtaining services, supports or justice as a crime victim.** Factors that present challenges for victims with disabilities include:
  - Lack of resources and support systems
  - Lower rates of police follow-up, prosecution, and conviction
  - A judicial system that is not physically or cognitively accessible
  - Believability and credibility within the criminal justice system
- 4. I/DD is often not readily apparent, so awareness and proactive outreach to this specific population is critical.** It can be difficult for victim service providers (VSPs) to spot disabilities that have no outward distinguishable signs. Yet, it is critical to be on high alert and open to the possibility that a hidden disability, such as “mild” intellectual disability, may be present so that effective communication takes place, and the appropriate supports and referrals are provided.
- 5. Crime victim with disabilities are often not considered credible witnesses, and yet can provide strong testimony when provided the right supports.** Victims with I/DD must be given the opportunity to file charges, report criminal activity or pursue any other legal action necessary in order to have an equal opportunity to protect themselves and protect their rights.



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Justice & Disability NCCJD™

For more information, visit our  
website at:

[www.thearc.org/NCCJD](http://www.thearc.org/NCCJD)

Contact us:

Phone: 202.433.5255

Toll free: 800.433.5255

Email: [NCCJDinfo@thearc.org](mailto:NCCJDinfo@thearc.org)



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<sup>1</sup> [www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/capd10st.pdf](http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/capd10st.pdf)

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**6. VSPs need to use trauma-informed care (TIC) principles when working with people with I/DD.** Many people with I/DD are affected by trauma because of the higher than average risk of violence and abuse they face throughout their lives. In recognition of the extent of victimization among this population, every program and service should conduct their work using the principles of trauma-informed care.

**7. Children with I/DD experience higher rates of all forms of victimization compared to those without disabilities.** Reasons children experience victimization include lack of communication skills, limited mobility, or inability to understand and comprehend situations. Offenders who prey on these children are typically those who care for them, have easy access to them, or are in or close to their families.

**8. The National Crime Victim Survey revealed that the rate of rapes or sexual assaults against people with disabilities was more than three times the rate for people without disabilities.** VSPs need to understand that sexual violence causes harmful psychological, physical and behavioral effects to people with I/DD. VSPs can work with other like-minded community agencies to help prevent sexual violence against people with disabilities.

**9. Children with disabilities are more likely to be bullied compared to those without disabilities.** 10 studies conducted in the U.S. on the connection between bullying and developmental disabilities found that children with disabilities were two to three times more likely to be bullied than their nondisabled peers.

**10. Persons with disabilities are one of the groups most at risk of being trafficked.** Governments often ignore this risk factor of disability and do not include persons with disabilities in anti-trafficking efforts. It is essential that victim service programs include resources for those with a wide range of physical, sensory, learning, mental, and intellectual/developmental disabilities.

For more information on this topic, see the *Pathways to Justice™ Training*.



Cycle of Victimization Chart

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