

Guide for service providers: **understanding and responding to sexual abuse**

What is sexual abuse?

Sexual abuse is any sexual activity that a person does not consent to, or is unable to give knowing consent. It can involve physical contact or non-physical actions that violate a person's rights and dignity.

Who may be at increased risk

- People living with disability
- People who rely on others for care or support
- People who are socially isolated, living in supported accommodation, or dependent on carers, family, or service providers
- People who have previously experienced trauma or abuse

What sexual abuse can look like

Physical acts

- Unwanted sexual touching, kissing, or groping
- Sexual assault or rape
- Coerced sexual activity under threat, manipulation, or pressure
- Performing sexual acts on a person without their understanding or agreement

Non-physical acts

- Sexualised language, jokes, or comments
- Inappropriate exposure or being made to watch sexual acts or materials
- Taking or sharing sexual images without consent
- Observing a person in private situations (such as showering, dressing)
- Forcing someone to undress or touch another person

How to identify signs of sexual abuse

Some signs may be visible, others more subtle. Be alert to:

Physical signs

- Unexplained bruising, bleeding, or pain in genital or anal areas
- Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- Torn or bloody underwear
- Difficulty walking or sitting
- Frequent urinary tract infections or genital discomfort

Emotional/behavioural signs

- Sudden or unexplained fear, anxiety, depression, or withdrawal
- Fear of specific individuals
- Refusal to be bathed or undressed
- Inappropriate sexual behaviour or comments (especially in people who previously did not display them)
- Nightmares, sleep disturbances, or self-harm

What to do if you suspect sexual abuse

Ensure immediate safety and wellbeing.

If someone is in immediate danger, call:


- ☎ **000** (emergency services) or
- ☎ **131 444** to report a crime that has already been committed.

If you are an NDIS provider or aged care worker:

- Report internally according to your organisation's safeguarding or incident management policy.

Make a mandatory report to:

- **NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission** (if person is an NDIS participant)
- **Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission** (if person is in aged care).



Work with the adult to plan next steps

If safe, speak with the person. Actively listen without interruption, be non-judgemental and show you believe the person.

Assist the person to access required services:

- Medical and forensic help
- Police assistance
- Advocacy and legal support
- Counselling or trauma services


Refer to the **Contacts for Safeguarding Assistance Information Sheet** for more information about who to contact.

Remain engaged and continue to provide support and monitor wellbeing.

If you are unsure whether someone is experiencing sexual abuse

Sometimes it can be difficult to know whether someone has experienced sexual abuse (for example, where a person has communication difficulties).

- Document what you have observed (date, details, changes in behaviour or appearance).
- Discuss this situation with your manager.
- Actively monitor the situation and continue to document your observations.
- Contact the **Adult Safeguarding Unit** for information, advice and support.



If you are unsure the Adult Safeguarding Unit can provide free, confidential information, advice and support.

A copy of the **Contacts for Safeguarding Assistance Information Sheet** is available for agencies.

Contact us:



1800 372 310

(weekdays 9:00am to 4:00pm)



adultsafeguardingunit@sa.gov.au



adultsafeguardingunit.sa.gov.au

Remember: safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Your actions can protect a person from ongoing harm and help restore their dignity, rights, and safety.



Government
of South Australia



human
services