

## Guide for Support Workers: Abuse and Neglect



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# Comprehensive Guide for Support Workers: Abuse and Neglect

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## 1. What is Abuse?

**Abuse** occurs when someone intentionally or recklessly causes **harm, distress, or exploitation** to a person with a disability.

### Common Types of Abuse:

Type	Description	Examples
<b>Physical Abuse</b>	Using force or causing physical harm	Hitting, slapping, pinching, pushing, inappropriate use of restraints
<b>Sexual Abuse</b>	Any non-consensual sexual activity	Touching, sexual assault, exposure, sexual harassment, grooming
<b>Emotional / Psychological Abuse</b>	Causing emotional pain, fear, or distress	Threats, yelling, humiliation, bullying, ignoring or isolating someone
<b>Financial / Material Abuse</b>	Misusing or stealing a participant's money or possessions	Taking funds without consent, forcing purchases, misusing bank cards
<b>Neglect</b>	Failing to provide necessary care, supervision, or services	Not giving food, water, medication, hygiene care, or safe environment

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## 2. What is Neglect?

Neglect occurs when a **person responsible for care fails to meet the basic needs** of a participant.

### Examples of Neglect:

- Not administering medication as prescribed.
  - Leaving a participant in unsafe conditions.
  - Failing to provide meals, fluids, or personal hygiene care.
  - Ignoring urgent health needs.
  - Failing to supervise a participant with known risk behaviours.
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### 3. 👁️ Signs of Abuse or Neglect

Support workers should be alert to:

- Unexplained bruises, burns, cuts, or fractures.
  - Fearful, anxious, or withdrawn behaviour.
  - Reluctance to be alone with certain staff or family members.
  - Sudden changes in behaviour or mood.
  - Poor hygiene, malnutrition, untreated medical issues.
  - Loss of money, possessions, or unexplained debts.
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### 4. 🕒 When to Report Abuse or Neglect

An incident should be reported **immediately** if you observe or suspect:

- Any form of **physical, sexual, emotional, or financial abuse**.
- **Neglect** that affects the participant's health, safety, or wellbeing.
- **Unauthorised restrictive practices** that cause harm or risk.
- Behaviour from staff, family members, volunteers, or other participants.

📌 **Remember:** You do **not need proof** to report – suspicion is enough.

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### 5. 📄 How to Report Abuse or Neglect

**Step 1 – Ensure Immediate Safety**

- Remove the participant from harm if possible.
- Call emergency services (000) if there is immediate danger.

### **Step 2 – Notify Supervisor / Manager**

- Report verbally as soon as possible.
- Provide factual information (who, what, where, when).

### **Step 3 – Document the Incident**

- Use the organisation’s **incident/abuse report form**.
- Include:
  - Participant name and details
  - Date, time, and location
  - What was observed or disclosed
  - Actions taken and by whom
  - Witnesses, if any
- Stick to **facts only**; do not include opinions or assumptions.

### **Step 4 – Notify NDIS Commission (if reportable)**

- Death, serious injury, abuse, neglect, sexual misconduct, unlawful contact → **within 24 hours**
  - Organisation will manage official reporting; staff may provide statements.
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## **6. Principles for Support Workers**

- **Never ignore signs of abuse or neglect.**
  - **Do not investigate** yourself; your role is to observe, support, and report.
  - **Protect participant privacy and dignity** when documenting or discussing incidents.
  - **Avoid blaming the participant**; abuse is never their fault.
  - **Follow organisational policies and procedures** at all times.
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## 7. Examples of Abuse and Neglect

Scenario	Type	Reporting Action
A staff member hits a participant during a behavioural episode	Physical abuse	Immediate verbal report to supervisor, incident form completed, NDIS report
A participant is left without food or water for several hours	Neglect	Immediate verbal report, ensure participant receives care, document in incident form
A participant discloses that a family member takes their money	Financial abuse	Record disclosure verbatim, notify supervisor, escalate to NDIS if needed
Participant is isolated in their room as punishment	Emotional abuse / Unauthorised seclusion	Report immediately to supervisor, complete incident report, escalate if required

## 8. Quick Support Worker Checklist

- Observe and recognise signs of abuse or neglect.
- Ensure participant safety immediately.
- Notify supervisor or manager **without delay**.
- Document **facts only** in the incident report.
- Follow organisational and NDIS reporting requirements.
- Maintain confidentiality and participant dignity.
- Participate in follow-up and support measures (e.g., debriefing, safety planning).

## 9. Reportable Incidents & Timelines

Incident Type	Example	NDIS Notification Deadline
Physical abuse	Staff hitting participant	24 hours
Sexual abuse	Sexual assault, grooming	24 hours
Emotional abuse	Yelling, humiliation, threats	24 hours
Neglect	Withholding food, ignoring medical needs	24 hours
Financial abuse	Misuse of funds or possessions	24 hours
Unauthorised restrictive practices	Locking in a room, sedation without BSP	5 business days

## 10. Key Takeaways

- **Abuse and neglect are never acceptable.**
- **Early reporting protects the participant, staff, and organisation.**
- **Support workers are legally and ethically obligated** to report suspected abuse or neglect.
- Use **fact-based documentation** and follow the chain of reporting.

**If you are in doubt, please call your line manager asap.**

### Disclaimer:

This document is provided as a training resource for NDIS support workers. It is intended for educational purposes only and does not replace the NDIS Act, NDIS Rules, or other official guidance from the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission. While care has been taken to ensure accuracy, Compass Care Group accepts no liability for any loss, damage, or injury arising from the use of this material. Always follow your organisation's policies, procedures, and applicable laws.