

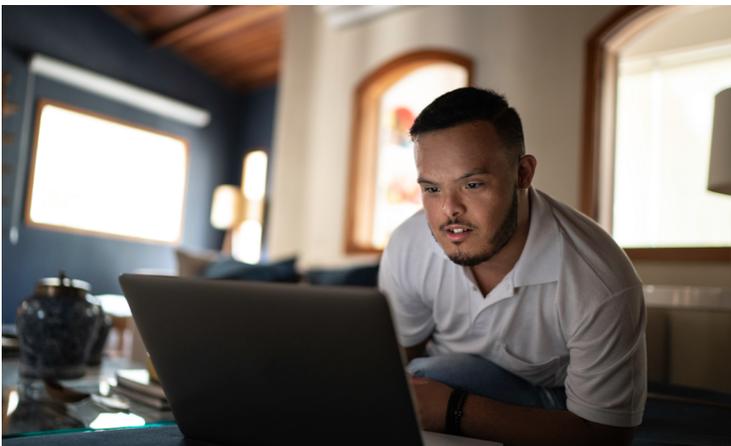


## Exploitation Prevention #69-11-21

As a professional supporting people with developmental disabilities, you can help prevent exploitation. It is important to know the different forms of exploitation to support people to be as safe and independent, as possible.

Exploitation is one of the 19 types of Major Unusual Incidents (MUIs). "Exploitation" means the unlawful or improper act of using an individual or an individual's resources for monetary or personal benefit, profit, or gain. Some examples of exploitation include:

- Someone using their influence to coerce a person into buying them items or to have their phones, utilities, or car loans placed in their name.
- Human trafficking.
- Social media scams where a person meets someone online and then is asked to send money, gift cards, or bitcoin, under the guise that they are in a relationship.
- Staff convinces the person to give money to a charity they are associated with or ask them to buy clothes, make-up, or household items from a direct-sales company in which they work.



Allegations of exploitation are required to be reported, as per the [MUI Rule](#) and your agency's policies. As with any allegation, immediate actions are needed to protect the person(s) while the allegation is being investigated. Those actions could include securing the person's funds, getting the person to a safe place away from the person who is exploiting them, or removing personal information from social media sites.



Listen to Andrea speak about how to protect your personal information and money

### Fast Facts

- There was a 23 percent increase in the number of exploitations MUIs from 2018-2020.
- In approximately 1 out of 3 exploitation MUIs in 2020, the primary person involved was never identified and was considered unknown (39%) or the person was an acquaintance (35%). Paid caregivers were identified as the primary person in 17 percent of instances.
- There has been a significant rise in the number of cases involving exploitation through social media platforms.
- In 2020, there was 174 exploitation MUIs and 59 percent of those were substantiated.

People with developmental disabilities may be at greater risk to be exploited because:

- They feel isolated or lonely and are looking for ways to connect with people. Social media platforms offer opportunities for connection but may put people at risk of being taken advantage of.
- People with limited verbal communication and/or cognitive disabilities may find it difficult to report.
- Many people with disabilities are afraid that they will not be believed when they do report.



## Exploitation MUIs

- A young man met a person on Facebook Messenger who was posing to be Selena Gomez. The man told his staff that he was talking to Selena and that she was his girlfriend. He wanted to send Selena money and his support circle discouraged him from doing it. However, the man chose to send gift cards totaling \$60 over FB messenger. While the police were notified, no investigation was conducted as the man gave this information willingly and it would be highly unlikely that the person posing as Selena Gomez would ever be found.
- A DSP shares with an older woman they are supporting that they don't have enough money to purchase holiday gifts for their children. The woman feels bad but doesn't have a lot of money herself. When the DSP asks if she can have \$100, the person doesn't want her staff to be mad at her, so she reluctantly gives the money to her.
- A man gets a phone call from a company, who said that they will check out his computer and fix any problems for \$240. The person sent two checks and no work was completed on his computer. The bank was notified upon discovery, but the checks had already been cashed. The perpetrator was never caught.

## Red Flags:

- Bills arrive in the mail for items that the person does not have like a cell phone or a laptop.
- The person is in a new relationship and sending money to that person electronically.
- Checks are written to people or companies that are unfamiliar.
- The person is buying gift cards and sending them to people they met online.
- You hear the person giving confidential information like their bank account or social security number out over the phone.
- The person is sending photos of themselves to people they just met.

## Reducing Risks and Preventing Exploitation

- Build a rapport with the people you serve so they feel comfortable asking questions and talking about difficult topics.
- Report financial discrepancies right away.
- Help the person meet people with common interests safely in their community and online.
- Never ask a person you work with for their money, belongings, or a loan.
- Guard confidential information about the people you support by keeping banking, benefits, and other information secure.
- Adopt a Code of Ethics for your agency.
- Discuss how to be safe online with the people you support.
- Practice answering the phone together and how to respond when a person asks you for money or financial information.
- Encourage the people you support to not answer the phone if they don't recognize the number.
- Know your agency's financial policies and the Personal Funds Rule.



- Help the person learn about different social media platforms and what the risks are to using each.
- If a person is vulnerable to being taken advantage of, make sure proper supports are in place.
- Encourage people not to click on suspicious links or emails from people they do not know.