People with Disabilities in Partner Relationships

Targets Disability with Physical and Sexual Abuse

Coercion and Threats
- Threatens to leave or to take children
- Says will kill partner, children, pets or service animals
- Threatens to have partner arrested or institutionalized
- Forces use of alcohol or drugs on addicted partner
- Makes partner steal or buy drugs

Withhold Support or Treatment
- Steals or throws away medication
- Doesn’t provide medicine or support when needed
- Doesn’t allow needed medical treatment
- To increase dependence, breaks or does not let partner use assistive devices (phone, wheelchair, cane, walker, etc.)

Privilege (Ableism)
- Overprotects
- Makes decisions alone
- Creates physical barriers to getting around (moves furniture, leaves clutter)
- Keeps tabs on partner for “safety” reasons because of disability
- Takes over tasks to make partner more dependent

Emotional Abuse
- Insults and shames about disability
- Gives conflicting messages by both helping and hurting
- Sneaks up to startle
- Abuses more as partner becomes independent
- Drives dangerously to scare
- Disrespects boundaries
- Talks down to partner
- Torments by not letting partner sleep

Economic Abuse
- Controls all money
- Uses partner’s disability income for self
- Does not share expenses because being partner to person with a disability is a “favor”
- Does not allow partner to work and be economically independent

Isolation
- Pressures to give up disability services
- Confines and restrains to restrict access to others
- Exposes disability (AIDS, mental illness, etc.) to others to isolate
- Limits contact with others
- Threatens friends
- Says no one else cares

Sexual Abuse
- Forces sex when partner unable to physically resist
- Humiliates sexually because of disability
- Makes decisions about birth control/pregnancy
- Cheats and lies (does not think partner will know because of disability)
- Pressures partner into prostitution

Minimize, Deny and Blame
- Lies about abuse to others (says partner is crazy, fell out of wheelchair, is forgetful, just didn’t take medications)
- Blames disability for abuse
- Twists reality, says abuse did not happen

Power and Control