



# Gather Information

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An After-Abuse Guide  
for Missourians with Disabilities

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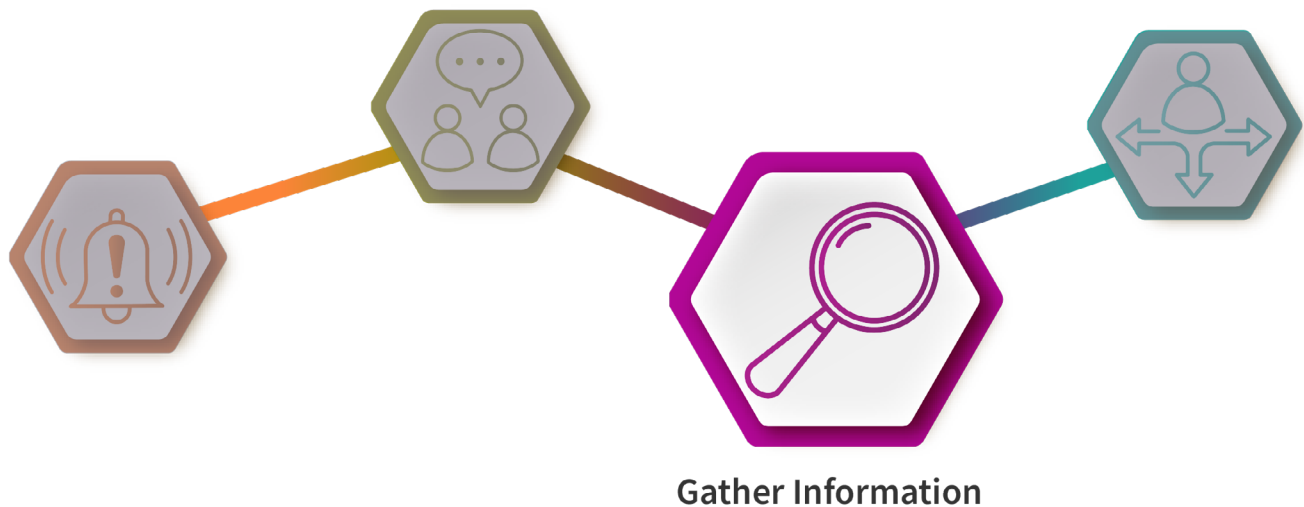
# Welcome to After Abuse: Resources for Missourians with Disabilities

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This is a series of toolkits for adults with disabilities who have been abused. Sometimes, it can be hard to know what to expect after abuse happens. This series can help guide you along your journey when abuse has happened to you.

### This is Phase 3: Gather Information

To find the other guides or to access the info videos and Easy Readers, visit [www.afterabuseMOguide.com](http://www.afterabuseMOguide.com).



**Made for people with disabilities and their allies by professionals in the field of victim advocacy and services, in collaboration with the disability community.**

## Gather Information

### These toolkits include:

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- Information about the different phases of the process
- Some important words and people to know
- Helpful tips for allies who are supporting you
- Information to help you talk about your feelings
- Information about choices you can make
- Resources and supports for survivors of abuse
- Easy Readers and info videos to help you understand important ideas

### There are four toolkits to help you.

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- 1. Abuse Happened:** This toolkit helps you know when you have been abused and start thinking about what to do next.
- 2. Tell Someone:** This toolkit shares ideas of who you can tell about the abuse, and how to know when someone is being a good ally.
- 3. Gather Information:** This toolkit tells you what will happen after you have reported abuse and gives you ideas for how to take care of yourself.
- 4. What Happens Next:** This toolkit helps you prepare for court and tells you about the possible endings to your reporting journey.



### Allies

An ally is someone who is on your side. They can help you understand the information in this guide. You can talk to an ally, and they will be supportive and understanding. They listen to how you are feeling about what has happened to you. They help you find resources or other people to help.

When you see, “For Allies,” it means that part is for your supporter to help them help you.

## Gather Information

In the Phase 1 toolkit, you learned about different kinds of abuse. In the Phase 2 toolkit, you learned about who you could tell about your abuse. This guide will help you learn about what happens next. It will guide you through the process of gathering information. This is called an investigation.

### **What is an Investigation?**

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When you tell someone about abuse, it may get reported. When the abuse is reported, information must be gathered to support your story.

Gathering information is sometimes called an investigation. The word investigate means to look at something closely to find the truth.

An investigation collects information that looks into whether the abuser should get in trouble. Reports are sometimes called cases.

### **People to Know About**

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#### **Investigator:**

An investigator is someone who gathers information about the abuse and looks for facts to find out what happened. They are responsible for doing the investigation. Who the investigator is depends on a few things:

- What kind of abuse was reported
- Who the abuser is
- If the law was broken
- Where you live
- Where you were when the abuse happened

There may be more than one agency investigating. When the report is made, the state will decide which of these agencies will investigate the abuse.

## Gather Information

### **If the abuser broke the law:**

#### Adult Protective Services (APS)

- This is a state agency that helps protect people with disabilities and older adults from abuse. They also investigate when abuse happens.

#### Law Enforcement (Police or Sheriff)

- A police officer's/deputy sheriff's job is to deal with crimes. They gather proof when people commit crimes. The police or sheriff investigator might be called a detective.

#### Medicaid Fraud Control Unit (MFCU)

- If you were abused and you have Medicaid, this unit may investigate. They want to make sure people who get help from Medicaid are not abused by Medicaid providers.

### **If the abuser is paid staff:**

#### Department of Mental Health (DMH)

- This is a state agency that helps people with disabilities get good services. If someone has been abused by DMH staff, they want to make sure it doesn't happen to another person who gets services.

#### Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS), Division of Regulation and Licensure (DRL)

- This is a state agency that inspects long-term care facilities, like nursing homes. They make sure that people who live there are being treated well. If you are abused while living in a long-term care facility or by a staff person who works there, this agency will investigate to make sure the facility and staff are doing their jobs right.

### **Other people:**

#### Victim Advocate

- A victim advocate is someone who can help you. It is their job to advocate or stand up for you when you have been hurt.

#### Ombudsman

- An ombudsman is someone who can help if you live in a long-term care facility, like a nursing home. It is their job to make sure residents in facilities are treated well. They can advocate for you when you are hurt or mistreated.

### Answering Questions

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During the investigation, you will likely be asked to answer a lot of questions. You will be asked some basic questions about yourself, where you live and about your disability.

You may be asked to tell the story about what happened to you more than once. You will be asked some specific questions about the abuse and who abused you. You might be asked who you have told about the abuse.

You can write down some notes to help you during questioning. You can ask an ally or a victim advocate to help you with this.

### Your Rights During the Investigation

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Sometimes, abuse can be hard to talk about. It can bring up upsetting memories about the abuse. During an investigation, you will be asked to answer some questions about what happened. When being questioned, you can:

- Ask for breaks
- End a conversation that is too upsetting
- Ask a victim advocate to be with you
- Ask for supports and accommodations to help with understanding or answering questions
- Ask for an interpreter if you are deaf or speak another language

You also have the right to:

- Be safe from more abuse
- Be free from threats or harassment
- Have your questions answered

### If Mistakes Happen

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Several agencies might gather information. Sometimes these agencies don't talk to each other very well. That can cause mistakes to happen.

Some common mistakes:

- Your report didn't follow all the right steps.
  - You were turned away when you tried to report.
  - A law was broken, but there was no police report.
- Your rights were violated.
  - You were told not to make a report when you told someone about the abuse.
  - You weren't given the accommodation or support you needed.
- You were not protected from abuse.
  - Your abuser was able to abuse you again after you made the report.
  - You were threatened by your abuser after making a report.

If these mistakes happen, contact **Missouri Protection and Advocacy Services** (Mo P&A) for legal help and services. Call Mo P&A at 800-392-8667.

### Feelings You May Have

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Gathering information can bring up a lot of feelings. It's normal to have mixed feelings. You are asked a lot of questions about the abuse. You might feel like you waited a long time for the investigation to end. Listed below are some common thoughts and feelings you might have.



**Frustrated:** *"Haven't I talked about this enough?"*

**Lonely:** *"No one understands what I'm going through."*

**Angry:** *"Why is this taking so long?"*

**Relief:** *"Finally someone is listening to me."*

**Worried:** *"What if my abuser tries to get back at me?"*

**Cautious:** *"How do I know who I can trust?"*

**Disappointed:** *"This isn't going how I thought it would."*

**Hopeful:** *"Now that people know about the abuse, I feel safer."*



### For Allies

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This guide is designed for someone with a disability to be used “side-by-side” with a supporter. We call supporters in this role an “ally.” An ally is someone who can help the person read the information in the guide and talk with them about what they have learned. An ally is a good listener who is understanding and supportive.

The section, “For Allies,” gives useful tips to allies as they give support to the person who experienced abuse. These tips can start conversations, prepare the ally to respond to emotions the person might be feeling, and support decision-making. This section helps an ally become a good listener and resource.



### ARE YOU AN ALLY?

#### Trauma

During the investigation, the person you’re supporting is at risk of being re-traumatized. Reliving the abuse experience can trigger the person.

Trauma can play out in different ways for different people. You may notice:

- Irritability
- Regression
- Angry outbursts
- Trouble sleeping
- They may even recant to avoid discussing the abuse

Good allies are trauma-informed. This means understanding how trauma can impact behavior and how your response can help or hurt someone’s healing process.



### Feelings

There is no right or wrong way to feel as someone navigates this process. Your role as an ally is to validate feelings as they come up, even if they don't make sense to you. It is also possible that someone will have a hard time naming their feelings.

Consider reading through the feelings section together and seeing if any of the listed emotions capture the feelings of the person you're supporting.

### Investigation

Keep in mind that:

- The investigation period can be very frustrating. The person may feel like others don't believe their story or they may get tired of waiting for answers.
- You should try to support the person to use their voice and to be empowered. They can ask for an order of protection. They can use mental health services to work towards healing, or they can press charges.
- As an ally, knowing the process for the investigation is important. The systems involved don't always speak to each other very well. Sometimes mistakes happen.
- Knowing when a mistake happens helps you know when to intervene, when to ask for help and when to hold systems accountable.

### RESOURCES

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#### **Missouri Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence**

Helps find a local victim advocate through the MOCADSV map of victim service organizations in Missouri. Click on your location on the map to find agencies near you. [mocadsv.wpengine.com/how-to-get-help/](http://mocadsv.wpengine.com/how-to-get-help/)

#### **DeafLEAD**

Has 24/7 crisis support and services for deaf or hard of hearing victims of abuse in Missouri. Go to [deaflead.com](http://deaflead.com) or talk with someone on video phone at **321-800-3323** or text “HAND” to **839863**.

#### **Missouri Long-term Care Ombudsman Program**

Helps residents in long-term care facilities, like nursing homes, by making sure they are treated well. Find your local ombudsman by calling **800-309-3282**.

#### **SAMHSA National Helpline**

Gives 24/7 referrals to local mental health services, support groups and community-based organizations. Call **800-662-HELP (4357)** or **TTY: 800-487-4889** to get mental health help.

#### **Missouri Protection and Advocacy Services (Mo P&A)**

Offers advocacy, referral, and legal services. If you believe your abuse report was mishandled or have not received a follow-up response, call **800-392-8667** or visit [moadvocacy.org/Abuse-Neglect.html](http://moadvocacy.org/Abuse-Neglect.html).

#### **Police**

Call **911** if you are in danger right now or if someone broke the law.

#### **Suicide and Crisis Lifeline**

Call **988** if you need to talk right away to a mental health counselor about how you're feeling.

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Find more tools and resources at  
**[afterabuseMOguide.com](https://afterabuseMOguide.com)**

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