

# Care, support and treatment of people with a developmental disability and challenging behaviours.

## Part I: Consensus Guidelines, May 2016

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### Guideline 15: Considering trauma as part of understanding a person's history, life events and stressors

Note. The upcoming tools for the care, support and treatment of people with a developmental disability and challenging behaviours will suggest many resources that can be useful to caregivers supporting individuals who are potentially suffering from trauma, something that could help understand and better support some individuals with challenging behaviour.

Examining challenging behaviours from a mental health perspective involves considering the possibility of trauma. Trauma can be caused by a number of events such as:

- grief
- sexual abuse
- physical abuse
- psychological abuse.

There is growing interest in understanding the psychological consequences of life events for people with a developmental disability.

"Deciding whether something is traumatic is influenced not only by the event itself but by how the person experienced the event. Something that may seem small or insignificant could be very traumatic to the person with a developmental disability. Furthermore, because the concept of time can be confusing for someone with a developmental disability, an event that happened a long time ago may still have a major impact. For some individuals, such as someone with autism spectrum disorder, the "replaying" of an event may not lessen over time, so that if it is remembered, it is with the same vividness as when it happened. This can be very distressing. Thus it is important to understand not only what the traumatic event was, but the context of the event, how it was handled or explained to the person then and how it is remembered or thought of by the person now." Yona Lunskey, CAMH

Distinguishing traumatic events from life events can be difficult. Studies suggest that the range of potentially traumatic experiences can be greater in people with a developmental disability compared to the general population. The Spectrum Institute Disability and Abuse Project [www.disabilityandabuse.org](http://www.disabilityandabuse.org)<sup>13</sup> as well as the Horner-Johnson & Drum article<sup>14</sup> focus on the high prevalence of abuse and possible traumatic effects with people with a developmental disability. Both documents will be included in the tools.

<sup>13</sup> Baladerian, N., Coleman, T. F., Stream, J., (2013) A Report on the 2012 national survey on abuse of people with disabilities, Spectrum Institute, Los Angeles, CA.

<sup>14</sup> Horner-Johnson, W., Drum, C. E., (2006), Prevalence of maltreatment of people with intellectual disabilities: A review of recently published research. *Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities Research Review*, 12: 57-69