Abuse of People with Developmental Disabilities by a Caregiver

Coercion and Threats
- Threatening to: hurt the person; withhold basic support and rights; terminate relationship and leave the person unattended; report noncompliance with the program; use more intrusive equipment
- Using consequences and punishments to gain compliant behavior
- Pressuring the person to engage in fraud or other crimes

Intimidation
- Raising a hand or using other looks, actions, gestures to create fear
- Destroying property and abusing pets
- Mistreating service animals
- Displaying weapons

Caregiver Privilege
- Treating person as a child, servant
- Making unilateral decisions
- Defining narrow, limiting roles and responsibilities
- Providing care in a way to accentuate the person’s dependence and vulnerability
- Giving an opinion as if it were the person’s opinion
- Denying the right to privacy
- Ignoring, discouraging, or prohibiting the exercise of full capabilities

Economic Abuse
- Using person’s property and money for staff’s benefit
- Stealing
- Using property and/or money as a reward or punishment in a behavior program
- Making financial decisions based on agency or family needs
- Limiting access to financial information and resources resulting in unnecessary impoverishment

Emotional Abuse
- Punishing or ridiculing
- Refusing to speak and ignoring requests
- Ridiculing the person’s culture, traditions, religion and personal tastes
- Enforcing a negative reinforcement program or any behavior program the person doesn’t consent to

Isolation
- Controlling access to friends, family and neighbors
- Controlling access to phone, TV, news
- Limiting employment possibilities because of caregiver schedule
- Discouraging contact with the case manager or advocate

Withhold, Misuse, or Delay Needed Supports
- Using medication to sedate the person for agency convenience
- Ignoring equipment safety requirements
- Breaking or not fixing adaptive equipment
- Refusing to use or destroying communication devices
- Withdrawing care or equipment to immobilize the person
- Using equipment to torture people

Minimize, Justify, and Blame
- Denying or making light of abuse
- Denying physical and emotional pain of people with disabilities
- Justifying rules that limit autonomy, dignity, and relationships for program’s operational efficiency
- Excusing abuse as behavior management or caregiver stress
- Blaming the disability for abuse
- Saying the person is not a “good reporter” of abuse

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This diagram is based on the Power and Control/Equality wheels developed by the Domestic Violence Intervention Project, Duluth, MN
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