

Domestic Violence and People with Disabilities

Part 3: What We Can Do

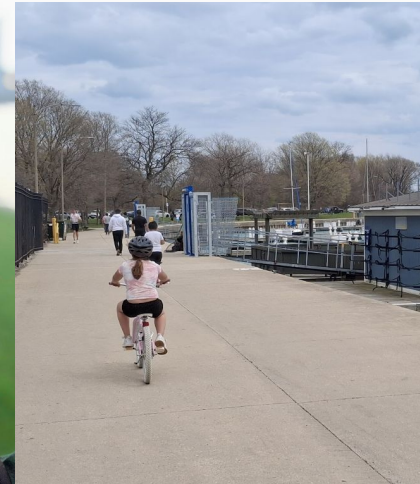
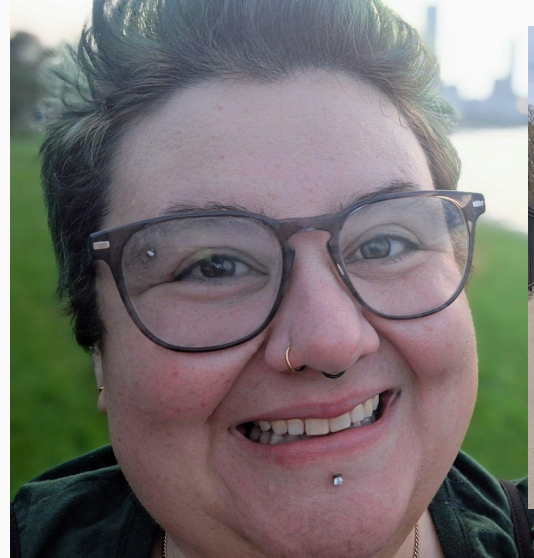
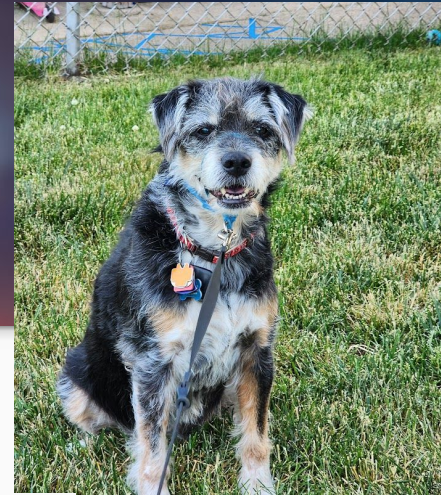
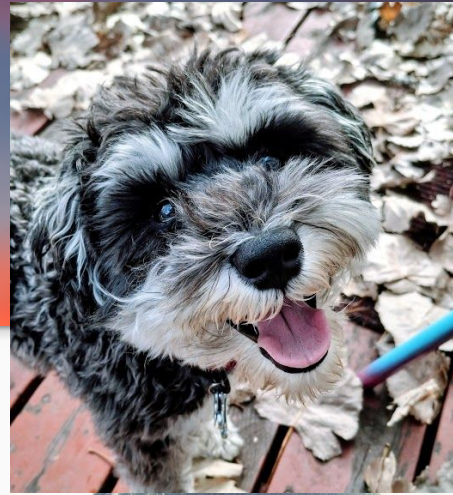
Ember Maselli, MSW





About Me

Ember Maselli, MSW is a social worker, researcher, and trainer with over a decade of experience working at the intersections of domestic violence, mental health, and substance use. Ember has conducted and supported mixed-methods research, evaluation, and training initiatives to inform healthcare, social services, education, and public policy. Ember leads with survivor-centered, peer-led approaches, with a focus on equity and accessibility. They have a special interest in disability justice, traumatic brain injury, and people with lived experience working in the DV movement. Ember holds a MSW from Florida State University, and lives in Chicago, IL with her daughter and two dogs. ember.maselli@gmail.com





Discussion Points for Today

- Review of domestic violence definition
- Review of DV and disability
- Learn about the social-ecological model to help support survivors of DV with disabilities
- Learn about prevention, support, and services for survivors of DV with disabilities

Ultimately: Understand how we can support people with disabilities facing domestic violence



But Wait! There's More!

3/3/26: Domestic Violence and People with Disabilities: Prevalence and Types of Abuse

4/14/26: Domestic Violence and People with Disabilities: Dynamics and Systemic Barriers

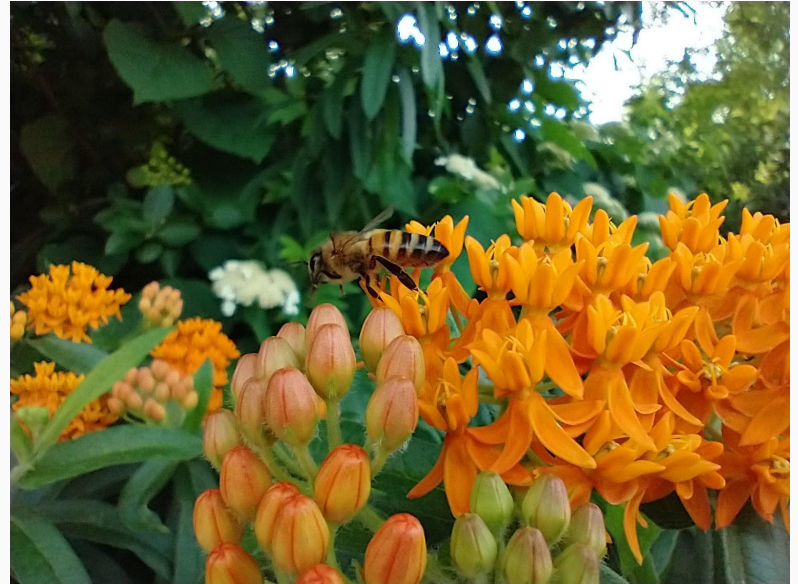
5/5/26: Domestic Violence and People with Disabilities: What We Can Do

6/2/26: Domestic Violence and People with Disabilities: Building Connections and Q&A
Follow-Up

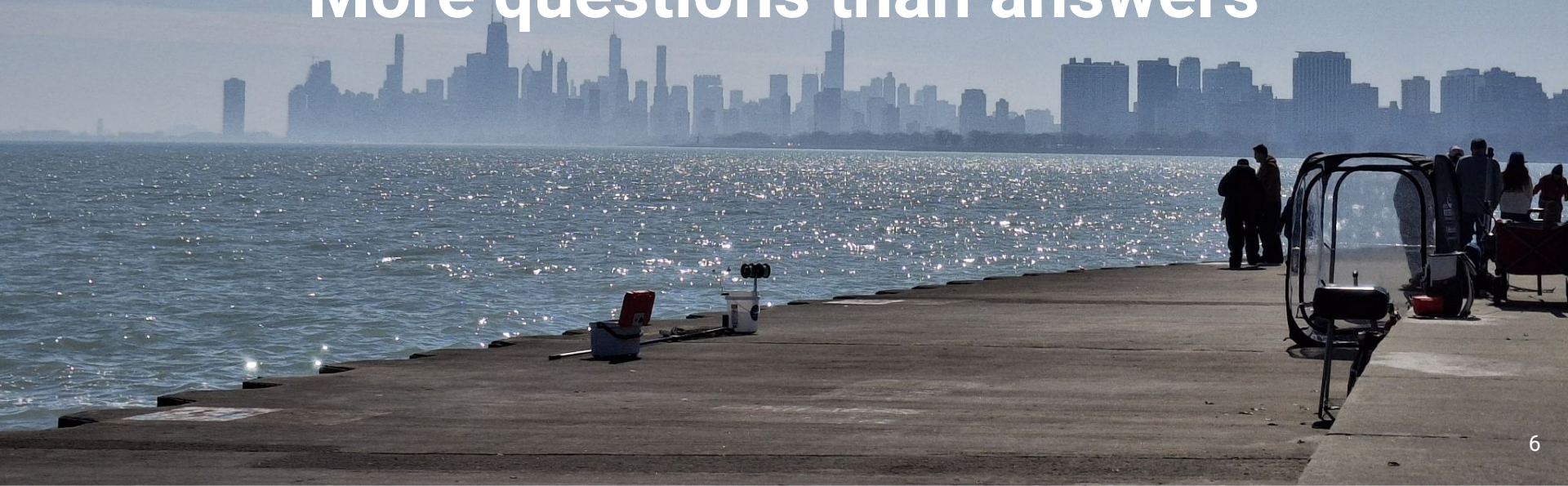


Notes

- Language
 - Survivor, victim, abuser, abusive partner
 - People with disabilities (PWD)
- Gender
 - Gender-based violence
 - Power dynamics
- Data, prevalence, and studies
 - Underreported
 - Aggregated
 - Dated



Taking care of yourself: More questions than answers





What is domestic violence?

Domestic violence, sometimes called intimate partner violence, is a **pattern of intentional behaviors** intended to **assert power and control** over a partner or former partner.



Abuse Tactics

- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Emotional/Psychological abuse
- Financial abuse
- Isolation
- Spiritual abuse
- Stalking and cyber abuse
- Restricting access to care





Dynamics of Abuse and People with Disabilities

- Abusive partners may leverage a survivor's disability as another means to harm them.
 - Withhold medication or treatment
 - Withhold or damage accessibility devices (e.g., wheelchairs, walkers)
 - Restrict accessibility to society, language, family, friends
 - Threaten to institutionalize/hospitalize
 - Physically overpower, harm
 - Use societal stigma against survivors with disability
 - Employ mental health and substance use coercion



Abuse and People with Disabilities

- PWD are twice as likely to be abused by a partner than those without a disability.
- PWD report more severe physical abuse than those without a disability.
- Studies estimate that 80% of disabled women have been sexually assaulted, the majority by an intimate partner.



What can we do?

Important notes:

- Victims and survivors of domestic violence, sexual violence, and other forms of abuse are **NOT** to blame for the abuse they have experienced.
- Abuse is the fault of the **abusive person**.
- We have a responsibility as members of our communities to prevent abuse, support survivors of abuse, and connect them to **adequate** support and services they **want**.

A wide-angle photograph of a city skyline across a large body of water. The sky is filled with heavy, grey clouds, with some light breaking through near the horizon. The water in the foreground is choppy with small waves. In the distance, a dense cluster of skyscrapers is visible. The foreground shows a concrete pier or walkway with some small signs and a wooden ramp on the left.

Take a breather. Stretch. Any questions?



Who are we?

- People with disabilities (PWD)
- Advocates with PWD
- Friends and family of PWD
- Social service providers
- Medical providers
- Community members

Our Place in the Social-Ecological Model



Individual

- Biological, medical, disability, and personal history factors
- Age, education, income, substance use, or history of abuse

Relationship

- Peers, partners and family members

Community

- Schools, workplaces, hospitals, and neighborhoods, in which social relationships occur

Societal

- Broad social factors, social and cultural norms that support violence
- Health, economic, educational, and social policies that help to maintain economic or social inequalities between groups in society.

Individual

37 years old

Mother

White

Survivor of DV

Person with Disabilities

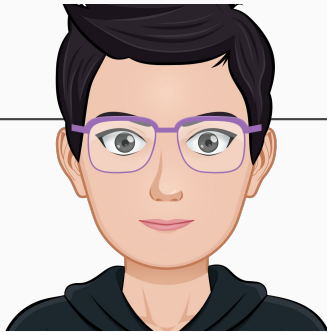
Mental Health Advocate

Master's Degree

Lesbian

Gender

Non-Conforming



Relationship

7 year old daughter

Friends

Co-workers

Parents

Sister

Grandparents

Neighbors

School Moms



Community

Daughter's school

Workplace

Collaborators

Community leaders

Parent-Teacher

Association

Immigration support

network

Queer support network



Societal

Chicago

United States

Healthcare system

Law enforcement

Law makers

Federal government

State government

City and local leaders





Prevention, Support, and Services

Prevention: Efforts to **reduce** the occurrence of domestic violence

- Promoting healthy, respectful relationships
- Educating people of all ages and backgrounds about harmful relationship behaviors
- Creating protective environments and policies for survivors to share their experiences safely
- Engaging self, family, and community in violence prevention efforts



Prevention, Support, and Services

Support: Efforts to provide **safe, non-judgmental** space for survivors

- Initiating open, survivor-led conversations
- Using non-judgmental, non-blaming, non-accusatory language
- Focusing on listening and caring, not solutions or fixing
- Speaking in private environments
- Increase safety



Prevention, Support, and Services

Services: Efforts to increase **safety**, address **mental and physical health**, and help survivors meet their basic needs and healing needs

- Providing shelter, safe housing, food, and other basic needs for survivors and their families
- Providing trauma-informed, DV-informed services for mental and physical health
- Using community services, culturally meaningful practices, and accessible means to better provide for survivors of DV

Talking about domestic violence with PWD

- The goal of a conversation about domestic violence is to **express support, offer safety, and listen.**
- Survivors are the experts on their own experiences. Survivors, especially PWD, are often **discredited, ignored, have their experiences minimized, or are treated like children.** Our goal when speaking about DV is to **believe, listen, validate, and empower** survivors to make their own decisions.
- No one has all the answers. It takes the whole system to prevent DV, support survivors, and change our culture with services and interventions.
- Practice makes it easier. The more you speak about difficult topics, the easier it becomes.
- Connecting survivors with resources for support and services can be key! This can include:
 - Safety planning
 - Counseling and therapy
 - Mental and physical healthcare
 - Accessing benefits and welfare, health insurance
 - Education and support for survivors, families, PWD

Think about your role in prevention, support, and services...

Prevention: Efforts to **reduce** the occurrence of domestic violence

Support: Efforts to provide **safe, non-judgmental** space for survivors

Services: Efforts to increase **safety**, address **mental and physical health**, and help survivors meet their basic needs and healing needs



What comes next?

6/2/26: Domestic Violence and People with Disabilities: Building Connections and Q&A Follow-Up

- Having difficult conversations
- What is safety?
- Asking for help
- Self-advocacy for PWD working with DV providers

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Resources

New Jersey Courts: Information on domestic violence and court remedies

Love is Respect: Healthy relationship education for young people

National Domestic Violence Hotline: 24/7 phone and text support and referrals

New Jersey Coalition to End Domestic Violence

National LGBTQ Institute on IPV

How to help a friend, colleague, or peer: Advice on having conversations and supporting survivors of DV

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