

## **NAME OF ACTIVITY: Power Dynamics**

Possible Uses: Cross-training for Disability Service providers and Victim Services; Internal training for Victim Services; Community training

Target Audience: Disability service providers; Victim services staff; self-advocates

Time: 45 min. - 1 hour, including discussion and small group work

Objectives Upon completion of this activity, participants will be able to:

- Identify the three types of power
- Provide examples of the healthy and unhealthy uses of power in relationships
- Understand more about how the use of power is related to the risk of abuse

Key Terms & Concepts: **Power dynamics; Healthy vs. Unhealthy Relationships** for people with disabilities and those who provide support, including family, guardians, partners, friends, staff and personal assistants: **Types of Abuse and exploitation**, including examples

Equipment or Materials needed: Handout: Power Dynamics and Chart; Space for small group discussions

**Preparation needed:** Trainer should be familiar with Types of Domestic Violence and roles of support people in the lives of people with disabilities (family, guardians, personal assistants). **Power and Control Wheels** can be another helpful resource, such as this one from Project Peer, in Washington, DC:  
<https://www.endabusepwd.org/publications/project-peer-dc-power-and-control-wheel/>

**Instructions:**

Provide all participants with a copy of the Power Dynamics handout and Charts

1. Have participants read through the handout, including the first 2 charts. Lead a discussion on the three types of power dynamics, selecting 3 - 5 examples from Chart 2. Ask participants to provide their own examples of the 3 types of power.
2. If you feel comfortable that the group understands the 3 types of power and the role of support people in the lives of people with disabilities, then divide them up into small groups. Ask someone from each group to take notes and someone to be the spokesperson.
3. Using the Power Dynamics Chart 3, have each small group pick 3 examples and fill in each of the boxes: Type of Power, Healthy or Unhealthy, and Risk of Abuse.
4. Bring the group back together and have each small group report back on their discussion. If time permits, go over together any remaining boxes that were not covered in the small groups.

## Power Dynamics

### Power with

### Power over

### Power inside

When we think about how power is used in relationships, we need to consider the power dynamics: power with, power over and power inside.

Power with, or shared power, can be found in healthy relationships.

- Friendships, marriages, families, co-workers, any types of teams, and support groups share the power with one another.
- To share power with others means that one person doesn't make all the choices and decisions in the relationship.
- Each person's feelings and ideas are valued.
- Each person is respected and supported to be and do their best.

### Power Over:

- Once a person takes more power over the other, that is when abuse is more likely to occur.
- The person taking power over one or more people wants to make all the choices and decisions alone.
- They usually believe it is their right to have power over others.
- This person may tell others how they should act, think and express themselves.
- This person often demonstrates a lack of respect for others and their rights.
- This person may rely on bullying, threats, intimidation, force and fear to control others.
- It could happen within friendships, marriages, families, co-workers, any types of teams, and support groups.
- It also happens within caregiver/client situations, group homes, work environments, anywhere when a person takes authority over the other.
- It is important to remember, it is possible to have authority over another person without abusing that position of power.

Empowered and Power Inside means people are recognizing and expressing their own power: the power inside.

- They use their power to take legal action against their abusers.
- They use their power to speak up for their rights.
- They use their power to make choices based on what they believe is best for their lives.
- They use their power to seek out the information and support they need to have healthy relationship






People with disabilities are most at risk for abuse, as offenders do not think that they are capable or will not report the abuse. This is often the case, as people with disabilities may feel that their disclosure won't be believed.

Times are changing and people are being Empowered!

Charts The following are three charts about power dynamics.

- The first chart explains the three types of power: power with, power over, and power inside.
- The second chart describes different scenarios, the power dynamic and whether it's a healthy or unhealthy relationship. It also indicates the risk of abuse, low, medium, or high.
- The third chart give the scenario but it has empty boxes so you can decide what kind of power dynamic it is, if the relationship is healthy or unhealthy, and if the risk of abuse is low, medium, or high.

**CHART ONE**

Type of Power and Control	Image	Description
Power with		<p>Shared power: shared decision-making; each person is respected; each person's ideas and feelings are valued</p>
Power over		<p>Take power over: one person makes decisions; tells others how to act and think; does not respect or think other person is capable of choice</p>
Power inside		<p>Power within or inside: Feeling and believing one is empowered and has the right to speak and act - to advocate for oneself</p>

<b>CHART TWO</b>			
<b>Scenario</b>	<b>Power Dynamic</b>	<b>Healthy/Unhealthy Relationship</b>	<b>Risk of Abuse</b>
Friends playing together	Shared power	Healthy	Low
Couple having consensual sex	Shared power	Healthy	Low
Married person forcing spouse to have sex	Power over	Unhealthy	High
Hiring a personal assistant	Shared power	Healthy	Low
Personal assistant working for some one	Shared power	Healthy	Low
Disability service staff working together with the person on their service plan	Shared power	Healthy	Low
Personal assistant asking for favors	Power over	Unhealthy	Medium
Personal assistant mistreating someone's belongings	Power over	Unhealthy	Medium to high
Personal assistant committing domestic violence or sexual assault	Power over	Unhealthy	High
Person seeking help after abuse	Power within	Healthy	Low
Person attending self-advocacy meeting	Power within	Healthy	Low
Person firing personal assistant who abused them	Power within	Healthy	Low

**Now you can have a turn to fill in the boxes:**

<b>CHART THREE</b>			
<b>Scenario</b>	<b>Power Dynamic?</b>	<b>Healthy/Unhealthy Relationship?</b>	<b>Risk of Abuse?</b>
Parent/Guardian makes all decisions for the survivor without asking what the survivor might want			
Disability service staff enters the survivor's room without knocking or asking to enter			
Personal assistant takes money from survivor's wallet to pay for survivor's groceries without asking			
Former partner keeps showing up at survivor's workplace to check up on the survivor			
Partner laughs at or makes fun when the survivor struggles to complete a task			
You and your friend want to see a movie, but you each want to see a different movie. You and your friend agree to work it out.			