From Dr. Escudé...

Environmental Factors that may Contribute to Injury Patterns in People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD)

In people that may have a limited ability to communicate with words, it can be difficult to get an accurate history regarding what may be causing injuries. Looking at injury patterns can sometimes give you valuable clues to what is happening. For instance:

- A bruise pattern of a hand or of fingers can indicate excessive force with lifting or possibly abuse.
- Several bruises that are similar in shape or location can be from an environmental situation. An example would be where a person has 3 linear bruises on the back of their leg of different ages. In this case, the person was found to be rocking in a rocking chair and hitting the back of her leg on a bar in the front of the chair causing these bruises. A repetitive pattern can also be a sign of abuse, as well.
- Falls can cause various types of repetitive injuries. Look at the person’s environment for hazards. Consider medical conditions that might cause falling such as seizures, hypotension, or mediation side effects like somnolence. Also consider the potential of abuse.

Orthotics and assistive devices
Ill-fitting orthotic devices can cause repetitive bruising and skin irritation as well as increase the risk of falling. A PT or OT evaluation should be considered for any suspicion of these conditions. A simple adjustment of a device can lessen the risk of injury.

PT and OT evaluations should also be considered for gait or postural irregularities that may contribute to falls and injuries, as well.

Abuse
Studies have shown that the rates of abuse are higher in people with IDD. Limited ability to communicate verbally can make determining what is actually happening more difficult. Sometimes people communicate with
behaviors rather than words. Some behaviors that might indicate sexual or non-sexual abuse are listed below:

- New onset of urinary or fecal incontinence
- Withdrawal
- Excessive masturbation
- Refusal to allow bathing or aggression during bathing
- Self-restraint (wrapping one’s self inside their shirt, wrapping a blanket or throw tightly around themselves, knees to chest and hugging)
- Sexual aggression toward others
- Agitation
- Verbal or physical aggression when approached by a caregiver or others - especially if the person shares characteristics with abuser (male, female, tall, short hair, Caucasian, African American)
- Suicidal behavior/attempt
- Night terrors

It’s important to always consider all causes of injury and to thoroughly evaluate for any preventable causes. Thank you for your careful attention to helping improve the lives of people we support.

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Dr. Escudé has dedicated his career to providing healthcare for people with IDD and other vulnerable populations and teaches on the subject throughout the country.