

AutCom Position on Restraints and Seclusion

The Autism National Committee condemns the widespread and non-emergency use of seclusion and mechanical and physical restraints as restricting the civil and human rights of people with disabilities. We believe that the use of restraints and seclusion is a failure in supports, accommodations, and instructional methods. We believe that the use of electric skin shock (a procedure which continues at the Judge Rotenberg Center in Massachusetts) is inhumane.

People who have survived the force of restraint have reported they feared they would die in restraint, and some have died. A number of tragic cases of restraint-related injuries and deaths of children and adults have recently made the national news. Estimates of deaths occurring during or shortly after restraint currently range from 50 to 150 annually (link to "How Safe Is the Schoolhouse?"). The actual magnitude of such deaths is poorly tracked and subject to under reporting, a fact recently stated by a federal Department of Health and Human Services spokesperson.

Many have reported that they now live with fear and flashbacks that involve a sudden, involuntary re-living of this emotional and physically traumatic experience. Post-traumatic stress disorder is increasingly being diagnosed among persons who have been subjected to the systematic use of restraints.

It is clear that individuals' sometimes desperate efforts to communicate are ignored while staff force compliance for oftentimes trivial reasons; that the cumulative effects of repeated restraint can lead to diminished self-image and to negative attitudes; and that when restraint is used, struggle is provoked, and this natural response increases the danger of physical injury.

In our experiences as professionals, parents, and autistics, we have witnessed too many times the horror and injury done to autistics. We are appalled at and weary of seeing autistics become victims.

Although any one of us, disabled or not, may at some point in our lives need to be restrained in a true emergency, that should only be when there is substantial threat of injury to self or others. Behavioral restraints are neither treatment nor education. They are merely procedures or methods that restrict freedom of choice and adversely affect the human development of people with disabilities. The use of restraints should be considered a failure in supports, accommodations, and instructional practices. We totally condemn the use of behavioral restraints, the use of seclusion, the use of electric skin shock, and the use of food deprivation.

We call on national and state agencies to investigate the widespread mistreatment of people with disabilities through the use of restraints and seclusion.

We call on Congress and state legislatures to pass legislation to protect people with disabilities; to limit the use of restraints and seclusion on children and adults with disabilities to brief, emergency situations involving serious threat of injury to the person

with disabilities or to others; to require immediate reporting of these incidents; to require thorough investigations of the circumstances that lead to an incident; and to require the development of supports and accommodations to prevent future incidents.

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