

How Can We Prevent This?

1. Change the conversation

Center the victim. Condemn the murderer. Refuse to “understand,” excuse, justify, minimize, or normalize a parent killing their child. Refuse to accept this.

2. Ensure equal legal consequences

When someone hurts or kills a disabled person, that should not be considered a less serious crime because of the victim’s disability. Our society must treat harm caused to disabled people equally seriously as harm caused to non-disabled people.

Previous versions of this toolkit emphasized the need for equal sentencing for these crimes. We want to acknowledge that prison sentences in the United States are too long across the board. While we want to see crimes against people with disabilities treated seriously, we do not want to make that problem worse. We want the criminal legal system to value people with disabilities’ lives in the same way it values people without disabilities’ lives. We believe this is compatible with reducing prison sentences in general, and finding ways to punish filicides other than prison. A person’s disability does not mean that their life is less valuable and does not mean that their murder is less tragic or less of a crime.

ASAN also recognizes that our criminal legal system does not treat everyone equally. People of color, people with disabilities, immigrants and other people with marginalized identities are more likely to receive prison sentences and often receive harsher prison sentences than white people and people without disabilities who have committed the same crime. A criminal legal system that does not recognize the inequalities it is built upon cannot be effective in addressing harm to marginalized communities like the disability community. If we want the criminal legal system to effectively respond to violence, we must end the violence that comes from that system.

To advocate for changes to our criminal legal system, you can speak to your representatives or work with local advocacy and mutual aid groups.

3. End ableism

Challenge ableism (anti-disability bias and prejudice) everywhere you see it. Challenge the idea that it is better to be dead than disabled, that disabled people are a drain on society, that disability means suffering, and that disabled lives are not worth living. Promote inclusion, community integration, and acceptance.

If you see people responding to filicide in ableist ways, such as by writing news articles that frame a filicide as a “mercy killing” because of a victim’s disability, you can speak out! The [Op-Ed Project](#) provides resources to help you write to your local paper, including responding to or criticizing their coverage.

4. If you suspect abuse, get help

If you are concerned that someone is going to be hurt or killed, you can contact an abuse hotline to try to get help for that person. Examples of hotlines are:

- The 988 Lifeline. 988 is a number you can call or text to reach mental health crisis services in your area. While filicide does not happen because of a mental illness, 988 operators are trained in what to do if someone is threatening violence against another person.
- The National Domestic Violence Hotline at 800-799-7233. This hotline is for people experiencing abuse in their families. Volunteers are able to help people find local resources.

There are risks to contacting social services through an abuse hotline. Services like Child Protective Services and Adult Protective Services can discriminate against families of color or families where parents are disabled. Child Protective Services sometimes responds to situations where families need help due to poverty, by removing children from that family even if there is no abuse, leading to trauma. Adult Protective Services sometimes acts to put adults with disabilities under guardianships that restrict their legal rights.

We recognize that police brutality against people of color and disabled people combines in ways that endangers the lives of disabled people of color. We recognize that calling 911 in an emergency can escalate a dangerous situation when police are sent instead of emergency medical teams. If we want people to access social services for help in a crisis, we need to make those systems safe for people to access. We have to create practices that protect and support our communities. Police are not an effective intervention for social issues. Our society's reliance on the criminal legal system to handle social challenges does nothing to stop violence before it happens. Our criminal legal system as it exists now perpetuates inequalities that target and endanger marginalized communities.

The criminal legal system cannot be used to fix systemic oppression. We will not end filicide by criminal punishment. We will end filicide by changing attitudes about disability, providing resources that empower people with disabilities to make their own choices and control their own care, and working to create a world that values the lives of disabled people as much as nondisabled people.