

ABUSE AND NEGLECT OF AN OLDER OR VULNERABLE PERSON

Elder abuse is any action or inaction by self or others that jeopardizes the health and wellbeing of an older adult. This includes the denial of an adult's fundamental rights according to the Charter of Rights and Freedom. The abusers are commonly family members and this type of abuse is termed family violence. Abuse occurring in a care facility is termed institutional abuse.

WHAT TO DO

CHECK FOR

Acknowledge Barriers	Accumulate/document evidence of suspected abuse. Address concerns of fear of retaliation, withdrawal of caregiver and family support, confidentiality.
Urgency Screen Empower	Assess immediate risk of physical harm or if basic necessities of life are provided. Assess person's desire to access help and ability to make an informed decision. Inform person of the right to live free of abuse and the resources available to support this. Establish a safety plan.
Refer	Seek support or consultation from other professionals and offer the person resources.

FINANCIAL ABUSE

Theft or exploitation of a person's money, property or assets (e.g. interference in making own financial decisions, frequent requests for money, being pressured to sign papers, forgery, misuse of Power of Attorney).

Indicators – standard of living not in keeping with income or assets, theft of property, unusual or inappropriate activity in bank accounts, forged signatures on financial documents, coercion used in signing a will or releasing property, overdue bills, limiting senior's access to their personal bank account

EMOTIONAL ABUSE

Any action or statement that causes emotional anguish, fears, diminished self-esteem or dignity (e.g. threats to do harm, disrespect for privacy, belongings or pets, put-downs).

Indicators – fear, anxiety, depression, withdrawal, cowering, secretiveness, fearful interaction with caregiver, caregiver speaking on behalf of person and not allowing privacy, and physical signs of isolation (no phone, visitors, T.V.).

PHYSICAL ABUSE

Any action that causes physical discomfort, pain or injury (e.g. pushing, shoving, hitting, poking, slapping, forcible restraint, and rough handling.)

Indicators – unexplained injuries (bruises, burns or bites in various stages of healing), missing hair, bleeding scalp from hair pulling, untreated medical problems and history of injuries.

NEGLECT

The failure to provide basic or personal care needs (e.g. food, water, shelter, hygiene, clothing, physical aids, exercise and social interaction, attention, supervision if required, health care, and safe environment).

Active Neglect – intentional failure of the caregiver to fulfill their care giving responsibilities.

Passive Neglect – unintentional failure of a caregiver to fulfill their care giving responsibilities because of lack of knowledge, skill, illness, infirmity, or lack of awareness of community supports/resources.

Self Neglect – person's inability to provide for his/her own essential needs.

Indicators – Unkempt appearance, inappropriate or dirty clothing, poor personal hygiene, dehydration, unhealthy living conditions (dangerous and/or in disrepair), lack of social contact, irregular medical appointments, lack of or poor condition of dentures, glasses, hearing aids.

SEXUAL ABUSE

Any unwanted sexual behaviour including sexual comments, exploitive use of pornography, fondling or sexual assault.

Indicators – pain, bruises or bleeding in the genital or chest area, STD's, recent depression, and recent incontinence of stool or urine.

MEDICATION ABUSE

The intentional or unintentional misuse of medications and prescriptions such as withholding or providing doses that cause bodily harm or sedating or other adverse effects.

Indicators – Change in mental ability or physical activity and decline in general health status including confusion, poor balance, gait disturbance, falling, depression, recent incontinence and/or agitation.

*From Council Against Abuse of Older Adults et al. (Hamilton, ON) – adapted by Edmonton Elder Abuse Consultation Team
For further information, contact the Elder Abuse Intervention Team: www.edmonton.police.ab.ca January 2006

INTERVIEW STRATEGY

- Interview the senior alone in a safe location.
- Develop trust and be sensitive to person's culture, religion, comfort level and timing in obtaining disclosure.
- Note anything out of the ordinary about the person that could indicate abuse.
- Be alert to the person's wishes and the ability to comprehend information being presented.
- Identify what information is missing.
- Be aware of interdependent relationships and power differences.
- Consider the impact on the person, the willingness to change and the ability to recognise abuse.
- Note the person's understanding of the consequences of decisions and the capacity to follow through on those decisions.

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Are you being abused?
- Is there something you would like to share with me?
- Are you afraid of anyone?
- Is anyone currently hurting you or recently hurt you?
- Is anyone forcing you to do things you do not want to do?
- Is anyone refusing to assist you when you need help?
- Are you ever asked to sign documents that you don't understand?
- Who makes the decisions about your life, such as how or where you live?
- Would you like some help with...?
- It must be hard for you to look after...?

POSSIBLE INTERVENTIONS

EDUCATION

Inform the person of services specific to their needs. Assist the person in connecting with community agencies and support their decision to discuss their concern with trusted members of their family and friends.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Call 911 if it is an emergency – Do not hesitate to call the police if assistance is required.

Call 423-4567 Edmonton Police Service Dispatch Line – To discuss your concern with a police officer. The police will assist if an abuser must be removed from the home.

Call 454-8888 Seniors' Abuse HelpLine – Available 24 hours a day for support and information.

Call 477-2929 Elder Abuse Intervention Team – Serves older adults, 65 years of age or older, living in Edmonton who are experiencing abuse from a family member or unrelated caregiver.

Call 702-1520 Edmonton Seniors Safe Housing – Safe Housing provided on a temporary basis, free of charge, for men and women, 60 years of age and older, who are in need of safety from an abusive situation.

Call 408-Link (5465) Capital Health Link – Health advice and information provided by registered nurses 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Call 1-800-357-9339 Protection for Persons in Care – To report abuse in a care facility.

SAFETY PLAN

Always develop a safety plan when abuse is identified - Advise the person "No one deserves to be abused and we are concerned for your well-being and the well-being of those living in your home. Have you considered your options?"

Keep a Travel Bag in a Safe Place – The travel bag contains items that will be needed if you have to leave home. This includes ID, medications, change of clothes, copies of house and car keys, some cash, and important documents. Store the travel bag in a safe and easily accessible location in or near your home.

Develop an Escape Plan – Plan with the person where to go in case of an emergency and determine how long they can stay there. Encourage contact with trusted friends and family. Consider Edmonton Senior's Safe Housing. Safety Plans will vary depending on the type and severity of abuse. The above resources may assist seniors with developing more in-depth safety plans.