

Stopping elder abuse



Front cover picture by Rebecca Ward

Putting an end to the mistreatment of older people

If you work in health or social care and believe that an older person is being mistreated, speak to your line manager immediately. Do not keep it to yourself. You may want to refer to local procedures on adult protection for your agency.

What to do if you are being harmed or mistreated . . .

You may be very worried about talking about what is happening, but this is likely to be better than continuing to be mistreated. You owe it to yourself to seek help from a trusted friend or relative or from a health or care professional (see 'Who can help') to whom you can speak in confidence and discuss your options.

Who can help

Action on Elder Abuse Confidential helpline run by trained staff/volunteers. Freephone 0808 808 8141 Mon–Fri 10am–5pm.

General practitioner/practice nurse For advice and support as well as medical attention.

Social services/social work department See phone book under local authority (or, in Northern Ireland, under local Health and Social Services Trust) for local phone number and address. Staff can listen, advise and help you to take action as necessary.

Hospitals Anyone needing urgent medical attention should be taken to the nearest A&E department.

Social care inspection bodies For concerns about bad practice or abuse or neglect by care staff contact one of the following. **England:**

Commission for Social Care Inspection, tel. 0845 015 0120; **Wales:** Care Standards Inspectorate for Wales, National Assembly for Wales, tel. 01443 848450; **Scotland:** Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care, tel. 0845 603 0890; **Wales:** Care Standards Inspectorate, tel. 02920 825 111; **Northern Ireland:** Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority, tel. 028 9051 7500.

Police To report a crime, call 999 or your local station. Police can also offer advice on safety and may refer the older person to **Victim Support** (helpline 0845 30 30 900).

Carers organisations **Carers UK:** tel. 020 7490 8818 (England); 0292 081 1370 (Wales); 0289 043 9843 (Northern Ireland). **The Princess Royal Trust for Carers:** for nearest centre call 020 7480 7788 in London, or 01257 235 070 in northern England.

A free booklet, *Elder Abuse: what it is and how to stop it*, is available from Help the Aged (020 7239 1946).

Help the Aged is working in partnership with Action on Elder Abuse to confront the mistreatment of older people.

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WE WILL fight to free disadvantaged older people in the UK and overseas from **POVERTY, ISOLATION** and **NEGLECT**

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Why should we be concerned about elder abuse?

It may seem that the abuse or mistreatment of older people has little to do with you. But although it often takes place in private and may be hidden it is not a rare occurrence – and any one of us may witness or suspect abuse at any time.

You may think that an older person you know is being hurt but are unsure what you can do about it. If you work with older people and are concerned about something you have seen, you need to know what you should do. This leaflet provides information and advice to help you.

What is elder abuse?

Elder abuse occurs when an older person is harmed, mistreated or neglected by a person who is in a position of trust. The older person may be physically harmed and/or emotionally distressed by the situation.

Where and when does abuse happen?

Abuse, mistreatment and neglect can happen anywhere – at home, in a care home, day centre, lunch club or hospital. It can also occur in a public place, such as in a shop or restaurant or on the street.

What causes elder abuse?

Some abuse maybe unintentional – for example, some physical harm could happen if a carer does not know how to lift or care for a person properly. Lack of knowledge, understanding or training or even frustration, can result in mistreatment or neglect.

However, some individuals may deliberately

cause harm, distress – or perhaps injury. Some older people may be viewed as an easy target or, because they are confused, unlikely to be believed if they talk about the situation. Someone with communication difficulties resulting from, say, stroke or dementia, could be extra-vulnerable.

Who abuses?

There is no such thing as a typical abuser. The abusive person could be a health or care worker, someone employed to provide care, or a volunteer. It could also be a neighbour, friend, family carer or other relative. It may be someone living in the same care home or housing scheme.

Types of abuse

Abuse can take many different forms. It can be very noticeable or it can be inflicted in subtle ways. These are some examples:

Physical abuse Emily has a long-term mental health disability. At times her husband hits her if she gets in his way or is too slow or forgetful.

Psychological abuse Henry is looked after at home by his son and daughter-in-law. If he is incontinent, they sometimes threaten to ‘put him into a home’.

Financial abuse Annie’s daughter does her shopping and collects her pension. She never gives Annie any change from the shopping, won’t allow her any of her own money, and keeps Annie’s bank books, telling her that she can no longer look after her own finances.

Sexual abuse Janet didn’t like it when one of the male care assistants was on duty as he often

came into her room and touched her inappropriately.

Neglect Some care workers in the care home fail to answer call bells if they are on a break. They seem irritated by the demands made upon them and do not make it a priority to take residents to the toilet or otherwise attend to them promptly.

How can you know if someone is being abused?

There are a number of signs that someone might be experiencing abuse or neglect. These include:

- withdrawing from usual activities
- talking and interacting less than before
- becoming angry or aggressive for little reason
- seeming depressed or very lethargic, tearful or sad
- being reluctant to be left on their own or with certain individuals, or
- being uncharacteristically jolly and inappropriately light-hearted.

If you have noticed changes which are unusual or out of keeping with the person’s normal behaviour and situation, try to speak to them alone about what you have noticed and ask them about this. Be as open and honest as possible with them. You need to listen carefully to what they tell you, and offer to assist them to seek help, or do so on their behalf.

If you were right or still have strong suspicions, you can contact one of the organisations listed overleaf, having told the older person that you are going to do this. If the person is confused, or unable to make decisions, mention this when you report the situation.