

Elder Abuse



What it is and how to stop it

Advice for older people

Help the Aged produces a range of free advice leaflets for older people

Financial leaflets

- Can You Claim It?
- Check Your Tax
- Claiming Disability Benefits
- Questions on Pensions
- Thinking About Money

Housing and home safety leaflets

- Care Homes
- Fire
- Help in Your Home
- Housing Matters
- Keep Out the Cold
- Your Safety
- Your Security

Health leaflets

- Bereavement
- Better Hearing
- Better Sight
- Bladder and Bowel Weakness
- Elder Abuse
- Fitter Feet
- Healthy Bones
- Healthy Eating
- Keeping Mobile
- Managing Your Medicines
- Shingles
- Staying Steady

Leaflets are free of charge and available from the Information Resources Team at the address on the back page, email adviceleaflets@helptheaged.org.uk or fax 0870 770 3282.

If you would like this leaflet in another format, such as large print or audio tape, please contact the Information Resources Team on **020 7278 1114**.

Contents

What is elder abuse?	page 4
Types of abuse	page 4
Where does abuse happen?	page 6
What to do if you feel unsafe	page 6
Talking about abuse	page 6
Getting help and support	page 8
Recognising abuse in an older person	page 9
Useful contacts	page 12

Like every other person, you have the right to live your life free from abuse, neglect or exploitation, and without the fear of any of these happening to you. It is your right to feel and be safe.

What is elder abuse?

Elder abuse occurs when an older person is harmed, mistreated, exploited or neglected – by someone they know and should be able to trust. **Most abuse is a crime.**

The word ‘abuse’ is powerful and it can make many people feel uncomfortable.

It is the violation of someone’s human or civil rights by any other person or people. Any older person – male, female, rich, poor, disabled, non-disabled and from any ethnic background – can be abused.

No one has to put up with abuse. Help is available.

Types of abuse

The most obvious form of abuse is **physical**: for example, being hit, slapped or kicked.

But there are other, less obvious types of abuse.

Neglect means not being given the food, clothing or personal care that you need. These are all necessities for daily living. Neglect could include not being changed out of dirty or wet clothes, not being given the right medication or not being given enough time to eat a full meal.

Bullying can include being threatened, humiliated or verbally abused: for example, being called stupid, or being treated like a small child on a regular basis.

Theft doesn't just include items of value that are stolen such as money or jewellery. It can also be something that is seemingly insignificant to an outsider but it makes a difference to you. Theft could mean people you trust using your money or possessions in ways that you are not happy with. For example, someone may offer to pay your bills on your behalf but actually keep the money for themselves or lie to you about what they've actually spent. Or it could mean someone helping themselves to your groceries without asking and with no intention of replacing them.

Other types of abuse

Abuse can be unintentional. It could come about through **lack of knowledge**, understanding or training. It may be that the person doesn't realise they are causing you distress. For example, a family carer may bruise you by mistake by handling you roughly when helping you from a chair as they are rushing to get jobs done.

Unintentional abuse can also be due to a lack of time or consideration of your needs – this could include not finding out what you want to eat and then not helping you to eat it.

Sometimes abuse can happen through **frustration**. Someone may become angry with you because it takes you longer to do things than you used to: for example, getting dressed. This could make them annoyed and they could take this out on you.

Abuse can also be **sexual**. This could include being touched inappropriately when you are being helped to dress or bathe or while being cared for in other ways. It could also mean sexual assault. However, sexual abuse need not be physical. It can include people making sexual remarks or jokes in your presence that make you feel uncomfortable.

Whatever the type of abuse, the main thing to remember is it **shouldn't** be happening to you and it can be stopped.

Where does abuse happen?

Abuse can, and does, happen anywhere, to anyone. You may be abused in your own home, including by those who are living with you, or perhaps by relatives or people who visit you in your home.

You may live permanently in a care home or hospital. Or you may visit places such as day care centres or lunch clubs on a regular basis. You could be abused by the people who work in or visit you in these places.

No matter where you are, you shouldn't suffer abuse. If it is happening to you, you should be aware that help is available and there are people you can talk to about it.

What to do if you feel unsafe

You do not have to put up with something being done or said to you that upsets you or that you don't like. If someone is harming or mistreating you in some way, it is important to let someone else know. Try to talk to somebody you know well and trust.

You do not have to feel alone in your situation. There are options open to you and you can make choices about your situation and what you want to happen. Organisations exist that can offer you advice and support. See pages 12–14 for details.

Talking about abuse

If you feel you are being abused, you may be experiencing many strong emotions and thoughts. If the person who is abusing you is

a relative, friend or carer it can be especially hard to understand what is happening.

You may have different reactions to what has happened. These may include feeling worried, shocked, sad, scared or even embarrassed about the situation. And this may mean that it is very hard for you to talk about what has been happening or to ask for help with resolving the situation.

You may find it hard to talk to anyone. There can be many different reasons why it is difficult for you to talk about your situation:

- The person who is hurting you is someone that you love and should be able to trust.
- You may be dependent on the person who is hurting you for care or support (maybe even financial support).
- You may feel that you must have done something to deserve this treatment.
- You may be worried that if you speak about this situation the abuse will get worse or you will lose your care and support.
- You may be doubtful that anyone would believe you if you told them what's been happening.
- You may not know whom to approach or talk to about the situation.
- You may feel that if you involve somebody, or some organisation, to help you resolve the situation it is a sign of weakness on your part.
- You may think that the situation is too trivial, or that it won't change even if you tell somebody.

Although all of these reasons are strong, they should not stop you from telling someone else and seeking help with your situation.

People who are being abused sometimes worry that they will not be believed. They may think that no one else has such things happen to them. It may help you to know that many people experience abuse – and get help to change the situation.

Remember, you are not alone. Help is available for you.

Getting help and support

Abuse can be stopped and even prevented, but this can really only happen if somebody knows about it. If you are being abused and you want help to change the situation or stop it from continuing, it is important to let somebody else know what is happening.

It is always hard to make that first move, and before you pick up the phone or go to see somebody, it may help to think first about what you want to say.

You may even want to talk to several other people and seek their views. Or you may find it easier to write a letter about what is happening to you. However you do it, try to find the courage to tell somebody else about what is happening. This may take some time, but the important thing is to keep trying to find the confidence to take that first step.

If you don't go out much or you can't leave the house because of disability or ill health, you may not see other people often. Being isolated can make it difficult to recognise or report abuse.

Is there someone you trust that you can talk to? The person you choose to speak to may be a family member or other relative, a

close friend or neighbour, or someone else you trust such as your doctor, professional care worker or minister of religion. You may decide that you would rather speak first to somebody who does not know you. In this case you can contact one of the organisations listed on pages 12–14.

Recognising abuse in an older person

People who are experiencing abuse can be very good at covering up and producing convincing explanations about what has happened. It may take someone a long time to decide that they want the situation to change and for the abuse to end **and** to feel strong enough to do something about it. If the abuse has gone on for a long period they will probably have become used to making excuses. For example, a person with a badly bruised arm may say, 'I walked into a door', when really they have been hit.

You may feel that something is not right or have noticed changes in the person. For example:

- changes in behaviour – becoming withdrawn, weepy, angry or depressed
- changes in appearance – wearing same clothes, not washing hair or putting on make-up
- changes in lifestyle, routine or circumstances – no longer going out, not welcoming visitors or saying they cannot afford things they could previously
- injuries which occur regularly – black eyes, bruises or cuts
- unusual difficulty with finances – unpaid bills or debts building up

- an over-emphasis on everything being normal and that nothing is wrong
- seeking attention from numerous people – this may be that the person feels safer when other people are around
- appearing frightened when a certain person comes into the room
- seeming off their food and losing weight.

If you are worried that someone is showing any of these signs, you may want to talk to them to see if you can help. **They should never be ignored.** It may be that there is some other type of problem such as an illness or depression but it may also indicate that abuse, mistreatment or neglect is taking place.

How you can help someone else

If you witness abuse or suspect that it is taking place, you may not want to be seen as ‘interfering’ or you may be scared of ‘getting it wrong’, and therefore choose not to say anything. But it is important that you try to help.

- If you are worried about someone, try to be open and honest with them about it.
- Give the person the opportunity to talk. Make it clear you are willing to listen.
- Some people may want to talk but may be worried about how you could react. It is vital to stay calm if they start talking to you about being abused.
- Some people may ask you to promise not to tell anyone else about the abuse. Whether you are a relative, friend or a care professional, always be honest with them and never make false promises.

- Ask the person what they want to happen in this situation.
- Try to explain who might be able to help. You may perhaps offer to approach one of these on the person's behalf if they are unable to do this on their own.

If you suspect that someone you know is being mistreated and want to seek help on their behalf, always talk to that person first and discuss with them what you want to do and why.

Remember that for many people who experience abuse it can take a long time to have the courage to speak out and to seek help. Few of them are likely to make decisions about what to do overnight.

Useful contacts

There are a number of organisations and people who might be able to help with difficult situations relating to violence, abuse and neglect. These are:

Action on Elder Abuse (AEA)

Assists people who need advice, information and support about elder abuse. The AEA freephone helpline is run by specially trained staff and volunteers and provides support and advice for people who have been abused or know someone who may be suffering abuse.

Helpline: 0808 808 8141

Carers UK

20–25 Glasshouse Yard

London EC1A 4JT

Tel: 020 7490 8818

CarersLine: 0808 808 7777

Web: www.carersuk.org

A UK-wide organisation run by carers and working to support carers.

Care standards authorities

If you are concerned about bad practices, poor quality care or abuse in a care home, contact the appropriate organisation:

Commission for Social Care Inspection (England)

St Nicholas Buildings

St Nicholas Street

Newcastle-upon-Tyne NE1 1NB

Tel: 0845 015 0120

Web: www.csci.org.uk

Care Standards Inspectorate for Wales

Welsh Assembly Government

4–5 Charnwood Court

Heol Billingsley

Parc Nantgarw

Nantgarw CF15 7QZ

Tel: 01443 848450

Web: www.csiw.wales.gov.uk

Northern Ireland Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority

9th Floor

Riverside Tower

5 Lanyon Place

Belfast BT1 3BT

Tel: 028 9051 7500

Web: www.rqia.org.uk

Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care

Compass House

11 Riverside Drive

Dundee DD1 4NY

Tel: 0845 603 0890

Web: www.carecommission.com

Samaritans

Tel: 08457 90 90 90

Samaritans is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to provide confidential, emotional support on any subject.

You could also contact:

Doctors/practice nurses

If an older person needs medical attention or seems to be very upset or emotionally disturbed, talk to them about seeing their

GP or, with their permission, talk to a doctor or a practice nurse on their behalf. Health professionals, including doctors may also be well placed to notice physical and other signs of abuse.

Hospitals

For urgent medical attention in case of serious injury, the local accident and emergency department should be the first port of call. Or dial 999 for an ambulance.

Police

If you think a crime has been committed, report it to the police immediately. In an emergency, call 999; otherwise, call your local police station (see your phone book for relevant numbers). The police can also offer advice regarding safety at home and in the community, and may refer people who have experienced violence, abuse or crimes to the Victim Support helpline (tel: 0845 30 30 900), which is staffed by trained volunteers.

Social services

The central phone number for your local social services department (part of the local council) is in the phone book, listed under your local council. Staff will listen, take information and advise on the next step to be taken. Your local social services will have an elder abuse or 'adult protection' policy with guidelines about what to do. (If you live in Northern Ireland contact the local health and social services trust and in Scotland, the social work department.)

Please note that although Help the Aged runs an information service for older people called SeniorLine, this deals mainly with welfare benefit queries and cannot respond directly to enquiries about elder abuse.

Contacting our services

Home support

Gifted Housing A unique range of support services and care benefits provided to home donors. Call 01225 447 800.

HandyVan A free home security and safety service offered to older people who meet a charitable criteria. Call 01255 473 999 for more information.

Home shopping High-quality, affordable items to make everyday living easier, safer, more comfortable and more enjoyable. Shop online at www.helptheaged.org.uk/shopping or call 0870 770 0442 for a catalogue.

Insurance Home and pet cover. Call 0800 413 180 or visit www.helptheaged.org.uk/insurance

SeniorLink A home telephone service that connects you to a response centre for emergency assistance or reassurance (24 hours). Call 0845 053 2306.

Information and advice

Care Fees Advice Service Specialist advice for anyone entering or already in care, regardless of means. Call freephone 0500 76 74 76 or visit www.helptheaged.org.uk/carefees

SeniorLine In Britain, call freephone 0808 800 6565 or, in Northern Ireland, 0808 808 7575 for free, confidential and impartial advice on benefits, care and housing issues.

Equity Release Service Impartial, whole-of-market advice on all aspects of equity release. Call 0845 2300 820 or visit www.helptheaged.org.uk/equityrelease

Wills Advice Service Free, confidential advice about making a will, for people of state retirement age. Call 020 7239 1965 for a free information pack.

Community living

Discount car hire with no upper age limit, provided in association with Avis Rent-a-Car. Covers the UK, Europe, the USA and Canada. For details call 0870 60 60 100.

Insurance Travel and motor* insurance with no age barriers. Call 0800 413 180 or visit www.helptheaged.org.uk/insurance

SeniorMobility Helping older people's groups and projects to purchase vehicles and transport equipment.

*Motor insurance is not available to Northern Ireland residents

Help the Aged distributes over 3 million advice leaflets a year. This service is currently provided free of charge, thanks to the generosity of our supporters. If you found this leaflet useful and would like to make a donation, phone 020 7239 1983 quoting ref **IRT** or send a cheque or postal order, for the attention of Information Resources, to the address below.

January 2007

© Help the Aged COM/00 ID6108 01/07 Company limited by guarantee Registered in England no 1263446 Registered Charity no 272786

Fighting for disadvantaged older people in the UK and overseas,

WE WILL:

COMBAT POVERTY wherever older people's lives are blighted by lack of money, and cut the number of preventable deaths from hunger, cold and disease

REDUCE ISOLATION so that older people no longer feel confined to their own home, forgotten or cut off from society

CHALLENGE NEGLECT to ensure that older people do not suffer inadequate health and social care, or the threat of abuse

DEFEAT AGEISM to ensure that older people are not ignored or denied the dignity and equality that are theirs by right

PREVENT FUTURE DEPRIVATION by improving prospects for employment, health and well-being so that dependence in later life is reduced

Head Office, 207–221 Pentonville Road, London N1 9UZ

T 020 7278 1114 F 020 7278 1116

E info@helptheaged.org.uk www.helptheaged.org.uk

HELPTHEAGED WE WILL[®]