



- What is elder abuse?
- What are the types of abuse?
- Who abuses older adults and why?
- What are the signs of abuse?
- How is abuse reported?

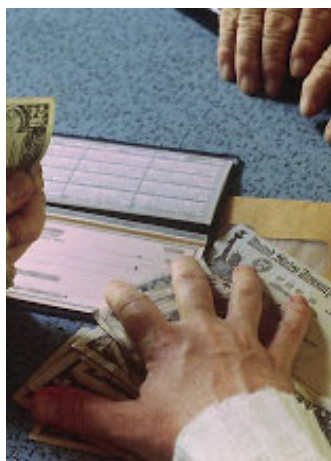


## What is Elder Abuse?

- **Abuse (elder)** is any act that causes harm or distress to an older person. This can include a lack of action, on purpose or not, that leads to an older person not getting necessary care, attention or necessities.
- There are 7 types of elder abuse:
  - financial abuse
  - physical abuse
  - sexual abuse
  - emotional abuse
  - violation of Rights
  - systemic abuse
  - neglect



## 1. Financial Abuse



**Stealing or misusing an older adult's money, property or possessions.**

Examples:

- withholding funds
- taking an older person's personal checks, credit cards or money without permission
- stealing items from an older adult.
- misusing power in decision making processes if the individual is competent
- phone or internet scams asking for money.

[Canadian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, 2017](#)

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## 2. Physical Abuse

**Inflicting physical pain, injury or harm to an older adult.**

Examples:

- shouting, hitting, slapping, pinching, pushing, burning, pulling hair, shaking
- unreasonable confinement or restraint
- forced feeding
- withholding physical necessities
- handling in a rough manner
- giving too much or too little medication, stealing medications, substituting another medication, or giving a medication for the wrong purpose

[Canadian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, 2017](#)

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## 3. Sexual Abuse

**Any sexual contact, activity or communication with an older adult that occurs without consent of the older adult in a state of 100% awareness, or by means of threats, physical force or emotional manipulation.**

Examples:

- touching or having sex with a confused older person
- intimately touching an older person during bathing
- exposing oneself to older persons
- making inappropriate sexual comments
- showing an older adult pornographic material

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## 4. Emotional Abuse

**Purposely causing an older adult mental distress or causing fear of violence or isolation.**

Examples:

- ignoring, isolating or excluding an older adult from conversation, social activities or decision making
- intentionally causing an older adult fear
- scolding, shouting, insulting or threatening an older adult
- not sharing important information with an older adult

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## 5. Violation of Rights



**Ignoring older adults' entitlement to basic rights and freedoms that other adults often take for granted.**

Examples:

- restricting visitors, access to information or community supports
- disregarding an older adult's privacy
- making decisions about an older adult's health, personal care, or finances without their consent, or the consent of their legally indicated substitute decision maker

[Canadian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, 2017](#)

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## 6. Systemic Abuse



**Rules, regulations, policies, or social practices that harm or discriminate against older adults.**

Examples:

- using physical restraints as a way to prevent falls
- diapering a person instead of helping them to the washroom

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## 7. Neglect



[Canadian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, 2017](#)

**Not adequately taking care of an older adult, by not providing basic necessities.**

Examples:

- not taking safety precautions like providing a walker, bed assist rails or bathroom grab bars for an older adult at risk of falling
- allowing an older person to live in poorly heated conditions
- denying access to necessary services such as nursing care, medical supplies
- not providing adequate supervision or not visiting
- unintentional ignorance or denial that an older person needs as much care as they do

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## 7b. Self Neglect

**When someone, on purpose or not, lives in a way that is harmful to themselves.**

- Many factors can lead to self-neglect. For example:
  - dementia
  - illness
  - malnutrition
  - overmedication
  - depression
  - alcohol or drug abuse
  - poverty
  - social isolation
- Unless someone is in immediate danger, authorities will not force an aging person to be safer.

[Slate, M., 2018](#)

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## Who Abuses Older People?

- Abuse usually takes place where the victim lives, even in institutional settings such as hospitals and long-term care homes.
- Most abusers are family members such as adult children, spouses, grandchildren and siblings.
- Abusers can also be friends, health care providers, health care facility staff, volunteers or any individual in a position of trust.
- Abusers can be any gender but are more often male.

Slate, M., 2018

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## Why Does Abuse Occur?

- Abuse can be:
  - impulsive and unplanned
  - intentional and planned
  - accidental with no intent to do harm
  - caused by ageist attitudes towards older adults
- Generally, the abuser is seeking to use their power and control over someone.
- Abuse is never the fault of the victim.

Community Legal Education Ontario, 2018; Action on Elder Abuse, n.d.

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## Why Does Abuse Occur?

Abuse might occur because of the abuser's:

- drug or alcohol problem
- depression
- other mental health problems
- stress
- inability to cope with stress
- lack of support from other caregivers
- view that taking care of the older person is a burden
- dislike of the responsibility of caregiving
- social isolation
- history of family violence
- caregiver burnout

[Community Legal Education Ontario, 2019; Robinson, L., Saisan, J., & Seegal, J., 2019; Slate, 2018](#)

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## Why Does Abuse Occur?

- In organizations, abuse is more likely to occur when staff:
  - are frustrated
  - have personal problems that affect their work
  - work in a high-stress environment
  - are experiencing burnout
  - do not follow care standards of the institution
  - are poorly trained
  - work in a physical environment that is unclean or disorganized

[Community Legal Education Ontario, 2018](#)

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## Who is Abused?



While anyone can be a victim of abuse, most abused older adults are:

- dependent on others for care
- over 75 years of age
- female
- widowed or divorced
- physically or mentally impaired
- have communication difficulties due to hearing problems or language barriers
- socially isolated
- living with their abuser
- financially vulnerable and/or unable to handle financial matters

[National Initiative for the Care of the Elderly, 2015](#); [Slate, M., 2018](#)

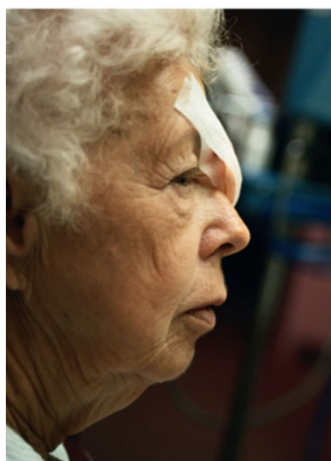
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## Signs of Abuse



Elder abuse can be hard to recognize because some signs of abuse can appear to be symptoms of dementia or mental decline. It is important to be aware of the signs so that the right help can be sought when needed.

[Government of Canada, 2012](#); [National Institute on Aging, n.d.](#); [Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2018](#)

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## Signs of Abuse

Signs an older adult is being abused include:

- sudden changes in behavior or appearance
- unexplained physical injuries
- depression or passiveness
- fear of touching or physical contact
- poor nutrition and/or dehydration
- poor personal hygiene
- inadequate living conditions
- incorrect use of medication
- confusion about new legal documents, such as a new will, loan or mortgage
- disappearance of cash, jewelry or other possessions
- sudden drop in bank account balances
- not wanting to speak about any of the situations listed above

[Government of Canada, 2012](#); [National Institute on Aging, n.d.](#); [Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2018](#)

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## Why Some Older Adults Don't Report Abuse

Many older adults do not report abuse because they:

- do not realize they are being abused
- have mental or physical impairments that affect their ability to communicate and report abuse
- fear they won't be believed
- fear the abuser will get back at them
- cannot see an alternative to the situation
- do not know their rights or how and where to seek help
- do not want their children to get into trouble
- feel ashamed that their children are behaving abusively
- blame themselves
- fear being moved into an institution

[Slate, M., 2018](#); [Robinson, L., Saisan, J., & Segal, J., 2018](#)

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## Recognizing the Signs



If you think someone you care for is being mistreated or abused, talk to them about their situation and express your concern.

Ask general open-ended questions like:

- How are you doing?
- Are you having any trouble at home?
- Can I help you with something?
- I see you have a bruise, tell me what happened.
- How would you like to be assisted?
- Do you have any concerns about your finances?

[Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility, 2019](#)

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## What to do if an Older Adult is Being Abused

- Respect the older adult's right to make their own decisions in their own time.
- In most situations, get the consent of the older adult before taking action or sharing any of their private information.
- Encourage the older person to seek help, and if you can, offer to help them find the right way to report abuse and use local support and resources available to them.
- If someone is in danger, call 911.

[Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility, 2019](#)

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## Laws in Ontario to Protect Older Adults from Abuse

- There are many laws that protect older adults from abuse.
- People who commit crimes that involve abuse can be charged with:
  - physical assault
  - sexual assault
  - uttering threats
  - theft
  - fraud
- Find more at [Elder Abuse Ontario](#).

[Elder Abuse Ontario, 2019](#)

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## Requirements for Health Care Agencies

- Care providers are in a position of power and trust. Any form of abuse toward an older adult is considered misconduct and requires reporting.
- The law requires any worker who sees or knows of abuse in a Long-Term Care or Retirement Home to report it.
- A person who knows of ongoing abuse and does not report it can face legal and/or occupational consequences.

[Elder Abuse Ontario, 2019](#)

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## How to Report Elder Abuse

- In the case of an emergency, call 911 or your local police.
- To locate local agencies that assist in managing elder abuse:  
Seniors Safety Line  
Tel: 1-866-299-1011
- To report elder abuse taking place in the Long-Term Care Home:  
Long Term Care ACTION Line  
Tel: 1-866-434-0144
- To report elder abuse taking place in a retirement home:  
Retirement Home Regulatory Authority (RHRA)  
Tel: 1-855-ASK-RHRA (1-855-275-7472)
- To report elder abuse anonymously:  
Crime Stoppers  
Tel: 1-800-222-TIPS (8477)

Elder Abuse Ontario, 2019

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## You have completed the Abuse eLearning Course!

For more information on this and other topics, please visit our [eFit Resources for Individuals & Caregivers on www.sagelink.ca](http://www.sagelink.ca).

We appreciate your feedback. Please contact [info@sagelink.ca](mailto:info@sagelink.ca) if you have suggestions, comments or have any questions.

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