

Let's Talk About Elder Abuse

A presentation binder prepared by Sandra Loucks Campbell PhD for Caregiving Matters.

Resource for Presentation: Ontario Association of Social Workers. 2009. Elder Abuse: A Practical Handbook for Service Providers. [Ideas and Direct Quotes used in binder come from this resource book. Full reference can be found later in the binder.]

Introduction

- › Elder abuse is more complicated than it may seem.
- › There are many types of elder abuse.
- › There are many kinds of older adults.
- › This is a group of people spanning 40 years.
- › Seniors come from all walks of life.
- › Many have some kind of disability as they age.

How can we approach this difficult topic?

The ways we approach elder abuse are influenced by the person's

- › age and gender
- › physical and mental health
- › living accommodation (*in their own home, in a retirement community, in a long term care home*)
- › family members
- › friends and other supporters
- › community support network

Trust

- › In this work, **nothing is more important** than trust.
- › Elder abuse occurs in an atmosphere of trust.
 - Occurs in relationship where there is an expectation of trust. Abusers are usually family members, friends, neighbours and caregivers.
- › Trust is the key.

When Should I be Worried about someone?

- › Elder abuse is difficult to discover for certain unless the victim tell you directly what is happening.
 - **Do NOT** to jump to conclusions.
- › The best way to discover what is happening is to spend time with the elder listening to their stories. Trust is the most important element.

Reporting Elder Abuse

The Most Difficult Thing is:

- › The older person's reluctance to report to you that they are being abused.
- › We need to FIRST understand why they might not wish to report the problem. Often their abuser is a family member.

Taking A Closer Look

- › Older person **may be embarrassed** or ashamed if they are abused by a child they raised.
- › Older person **may not want to cause problems** for their child or grandchild.
- › The abuser may have concerns related to employment, financial, physical or mental health. The victim may have cared for the abusive family member for many years before the abuse began.
- › Older adults **may fear “pay back”**.

Taking A Closer Look Cont...

- › A trained communicator could help uncover the abuse.
- › With passing years, the abuser may become one of only a small number of persons who stands between the elder and long term care.
 - Some individuals find abuse more acceptable than a move to a long term care home. They may see the abuser as the only person who cares about them.

What IS elder Abuse?

Defining Elder Abuse (OASW p. 5, 32-36)

Physical or Sexual Abuse

“The infliction of pain or injury, physical or drug-induced restraint. Physical abuse may also include non-consensual sexual contact of any kind with the elder.”

- › Assault, pushing, shaking
- › Non-consensual sexual touching, rape
- › Physical or chemical restraint
- › Force feeding

Indicators: unexplained swelling, bruises, genital infections, grip marks, others

Emotional Abuse

“The infliction of mental anguish.”

- › Name-calling, scolding, shouting, threatening, intimidating
- › Treating as a child, isolating
- › Depriving of decision making power unnecessarily

Indicators: Agitation, sudden changes in behaviour, withdrawal, fearfulness, no visitors, excessive deference to a caregiver, others.

Financial Abuse

“The illegal or improper exploitation or use of funds or other resources of the elder.”

- › Theft of money, property
- › Misuse of money, property, Power of Attorney
- › Withholding funds

Indicators: sudden inability to pay bills, withdraw money, poor living conditions, refusal to spend money without caregiver permission.

Neglect

“The refusal or failure to fulfil a caregiving obligation”. Neglect may be intentional or unintentional.”

- › Withholding basic requirements of living such as food, medicine, clothing, glasses, etc
- › Problems with hygiene, safety, medical help

Indicators: malnourished, too much or too little medication, open sores, odour, soiled clothing, lack of safety, avoidance of appointments.

Caution

When older adult is presumed to be capable they may refuse help. They have a right to live at risk which we must respect (p.18).

If the person is not capable or live in a care facility, they may not have this right to refuse help.

How can I help?

The benefit of talking and especially listening

- › You can build your relationship through conversation. You will understand better and help through listening carefully.
- › Elder abuse happens in privacy. The victim may have significant doubts about revealing such a problem.
 - The older person may fear pay-back, loss of support, institutionalization.

How can I help? Cont...

- › Elder abuse can result in isolation. With a friendly listening ear the older person will be less isolated.
- › As you enhance your relationship you may be able to ensure the person gets what they need (information, medical attention, food, safety, legal or police help)
- › Talking about this issue will open the door to future help from a variety of sources.

Conversations Matter!

How can we work together to solve elder abuse?

- › This is all about conversation.
- › Conversation with people we know – our friends, our families, our clubs and groups.
- › We would love for you to talk to your people about elder abuse.
- › We have pulled together some resources for you, in case you would like to help us in this endeavour.
- › Allow me to explain.

Where and how can I begin the conversation with others?

Let's talk about this. What are your thoughts and concerns?

- › Who would want to talk about elder abuse anyway?
 - Friends, family, clubs, groups
 - Older adults, family members of older adults
 - Neighbours who may be concerned
 - Many others

Where and how can I begin the conversation with others?

- › How could one begin such a conversation?
 - Let's practice this
- › How can we take it further?
 - Next steps
 - Handouts, postcards, referrals
 - Use of the binder

A Binder for You

a walk through this together

Who does what?

Helpful People and Organizations

One of the helpful things you can do is to make sure you know how to find and access good resources.

It would be useful to care providers to identify an elder abuse expert, one who knows the system, one who knows about aging. Ideally, the person would be part of an elder abuse team in a social service or health agency (p. 95 – 100).

Who does what? Cont...

Advocacy Centre for the Elderly: This centre is staffed by lawyers who are knowledgeable about issues of aging and they have a wonderful website full of resources.

Capacity Assessors, Consent and Capacity Board (Government of Ontario): Official representatives of government that help to deal with some difficult elements related to cognitive capacity and decision making.

Who does what? Cont...

Care Coordinators work for Community Care Access Centres. They coordinate a team of providers to assist, particularly where there are related health concerns.

Police: You may wonder when a call to the police is indicated. Police departments in large centres may have elder abuse experts to assist older adults. Officers in these units will often work with other local providers of assistance.

Who does what? Cont...

Social Workers:

- › Help with family abuse regardless of age
- › conduct assessments to determine risks
- › understand families and diversity
- › develop safety plans
- › deal with victim's reluctance to report
- › reduce family distress

Contacts and Resources

To find your local elder abuse teams, contact your local Family Service Association for the contact information.

Advocacy Centre for the Elderly: [416.598.2656] www.advocacycentreelderly.org. For legal advice

Family Service Association in Ontario: 416.231.6003. www.familyserviceontario.org

Local Health Integration Network (in Your Area): www.lhins.on.ca Information about health services.

Ontario Association of Community Care Access Centres: 416.750.1720
www.ccac-ont.ca (ask about Community Elder Abuse teams)

Ontario Provincial Police: www.opp.ca/ecms/files/250363273.4.pdf

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Related Legislation

Long-Term Care Homes Act, 2007

Health Care Consent Act, 1996

Personal Health Information Protection Act, 2004

Mental Health Act, 1990

Substitute Decisions Act, 1992

Federal Criminal Code

Federal Privacy Act

References and Websites

Advocacy Centre for the Elderly. [416.598.2656] www.advocacycentreelderly.org.
For legal advice and assistance.

McDonald, L. & Collins, A. (2000). **Abuse and neglect of older adults:** a discussion paper. National Clearinghouse on Family Violence. Ottawa: Public Health Agency of Canada.

National Initiative for Care of the Elderly. www.nicenet.ca

Ontario Association of Social Workers. (2009). **Elder Abuse:** A Practical Handbook for Service Providers. Can be purchased from the Association [416.923.4848].

Regional Geriatric Programs of Ontario (RGPs). rgps.on.ca

Seniors Info: www.seniorsinfo.ca

Wahl, J. (2008). **Elder Abuse:** The hidden crime. Toronto: Advocacy Centre for the Elderly.

References and Websites

Thank you for taking some time to learn more about preventing elder abuse.

There are handouts and information postcards that you can share with others.

Website videos about preventing elder abuse can be seen on: www.caregivingmatters.ca