

The **POWER** of
ATTORNEY PROJECT™

Elder Abuse Awareness

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 retirement community, in 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 a 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 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 care for the abusive family member for many years before the abuse began.
- Older adults may fear "pay back".

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.

Defining Elder Abuse

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, others.

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, other.

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.** If the person is not capable or lives 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.

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!

- Where and how can I begin the conversation with others?
- 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.

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 for 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.

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.

Care Coordinators: 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.

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

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:

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

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Resource from: Ontario Association of Social Workers. 2009. Elder Abuse: A Practical Handbook for Service Providers.

