



Elder Abuse

WHAT IS ELDER ABUSE?

Elder abuse is a single or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring in any relationship where there is an expectation of trust, which causes pain or distress to an older person.

WHAT ARE THE TYPES OF ELDER ABUSE?

Financial Abuse

The improper use of an older person's property, possessions or finances. It involves the taking or misuse of an older person's money, government benefit payments, possessions, valuables and property. It includes theft (stealing without the person's knowledge), fraud (deliberate deception to secure unfair or unlawful gain) and threatening or forcing a person to hand over their assets.

Psychological Abuse

The infliction of mental stress through actions and threats that cause isolation, fears of violence or deprivation or feelings of shame or powerlessness. Sometimes called emotional abuse and social isolation, psychological abuse is the most common form of abuse as it often occurs with other abuse types.

Neglect

An act of omission, something that a person in a caring role is not providing, when they should be. It is the failure of a caregiver to provide the necessities of life. This can include inadequate food, shelter, clothing; lack of access to medical or dental care or available support services; or not providing care when receiving a carer benefit. Neglect can be intentional or unintentional.

Physical Abuse

The threat or infliction of physical pain or injury. This can take the form of physical threats, hitting, pushing, pinching, biting, slapping, punching,

arm twisting, kicking, burning and physical or chemical restraint. Some forms of physical abuse are crimes including assault and battery and false imprisonment.

Sexual Abuse

A range of sexual acts where there is no consent or consent is gained through coercion. Sexual abuse is any unwanted sexual behaviour that causes humiliation, intimidation, fear or pain. Sexual assault is a crime. Sexual abuse includes rape; indecent assault; vaginal or anal penetration; sexual harassment; inappropriate and unwanted touching; and forcing a person to view a sexual act or to disclose their sexual history.

HOW IS ABUSE DETECTED?

Abuse of older people can be detected by:

- noticing signs or changes in an older person's behaviour or situation
- seeing or hearing an incident of abuse
- an older person or perpetrator disclosing abuse.

IS IT OKAY FOR IDENTIFIERS TO ACT ON A SUSPICION?

Abuse is usually complex and is often hidden. This means that abuse may be suspected rather than confirmed by initial identifiers. It is natural for a person to feel unsure or reluctant about reporting a suspicion of abuse. It is very important for initial identifiers to report any suspicions of abuse to a supervisor or senior team member. You are not breaching confidentiality, even if the alleged victim has asked you not to tell anyone, if you report your

suspicious to a senior team member. Volunteers and support workers have a duty of care to report back on any concerns about a client's health, wellbeing or safety.

IS IT MANDATORY TO REPORT ABUSE OF OLDER PEOPLE?

Yes and no. Yes, it is mandatory for aged care organisations to report some forms of abuse and serious incidents allegedly caused by staff and/or volunteers that lead to harm for clients. This is done through the Serious Incident Response Scheme (SIRS).

No, it is not mandatory to report allegations of abuse for people living in the community when the alleged abuser is a partner, family member or friend. However, in many cases, laws are there to protect the alleged victim. Domestic violence, theft, fraud, false imprisonment, neglect, assault and battery and sexual assault are crimes that should be reported.

WHAT SHOULD VOLUNTEERS AND SUPPORT WORKERS WHO SUSPECT OR IDENTIFY ABUSE DO?

In an emergency situation, immediately contact emergency services (Police, Ambulance, Fire Brigade) regardless of whether consent has been given and then report internally to a supervisor.

If not an emergency, report your concerns internally to a supervisor and complete all necessary documentation (e.g. an incident report).

It is not a volunteer or support worker's role or responsibility to:

- confront or alert the alleged abuser. This is unsafe and should be avoided
- confirm whether abuse is really occurring
- question the older person about the situation or give advice about what to do
- try to resolve an abusive situation.

