

Elder Abuse: A Closer Look

“The key message from this presentation - we need to become closer to our neighbours. We need to become a community again, so that we can help if we become aware of such issues.” –

Senior Participant



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Introduction

“Seniors are the least likely demographic to suffer violent crime, but they are the most at-risk of suffering violence at the hands of a family member.” (CBC News).

Approximately 10% of older adults in Ontario experience some form of elder abuse. As baby boomers age, there is the potential for more older adults to be at-risk of abuse. Increasing our level of awareness, learning to recognize the signs and how to report it, are important to the prevention of elder abuse.

During this workshop, you can expect to gain a better understanding of what constitutes elder abuse, when you are required to report it and how you can best support a friend who is experiencing or at-risk of abuse.

Opening Discussion

Engage your group in a discussion by asking them the following questions:

What do you know about elder abuse?

Do you think it is a problem in your community?

What is Elder Abuse?

DISCUSSION:

Do you think abuse is more than just neglect and physical abuse?

There are various forms of abuse, each having different signs and associated behaviours. The **Power Wheel** diagram provides examples of how the abuser engages in abusive behaviour to gain power and control over the older adult.

Physical Abuse

Hitting, shaking, restraining, pulling hair

Emotional Abuse

Name calling, not allowing visitors, threatening

Financial Abuse

Stealing money, misusing Powers of Attorney, forcing the sale of a home or stealing belongings.

Sexual Abuse

Any form of unwanted sexual activity.

Neglect

Denying basic needs such as food, shelter, medication, clothing

Spiritual

Restricting access to ceremony or other spiritual practices.



Prevention

Getting involved in social clubs and becoming familiar with local community support services is important. Be sure to plan for your future, while you are independent so that you are able to communicate your wishes to your family. It is important to have healthy relationships, other than family, to provide support and care.

Community services can be accessed through Community Care Access Centres (CCACs) providing health care services that enhance your independence and wellbeing and support you at home or in the community. Their services include: transportation, meal delivery and homemaking, nursing, physiotherapy, personal support.

Call 310-2222 (CCAC) – no area code required. See more: www.healthcareathome.ca

How Do We React to Abuse?

DISCUSSION:

What would you do, if you witnessed elder abuse?

Knowing the **signs** is important:

- Unexplained injuries, cuts, bruises
- Poor hygiene
- Unexplained or sudden withdrawal of money from bank accounts
- Inappropriate clothing for the weather
- Care withheld or access to necessary services being denied
- Fearfulness – Nervous around caregiver or particular persons

What if it happened to a friend or family member?

Sometimes we must ask difficult questions to start the conversation. If you saw signs of abuse what would you say? What if someone told you they were being abused how would you react?

Here are some tips to help you during these challenging conversations:

- **Do not blame**~ Remember to not use phrases like: ‘how did you let this happen’ or ‘why didn’t you stop this earlier?’ People who are experiencing abuse often feel guilty and it is important that we do not further isolate or blame the older adult.
- **Be empathetic**~ Family abuse and violence is confusing, there are often feelings of love for the abuser and a reluctance to tell. This can be difficult to understand but it is important that we listen to those feelings and not judge the decisions of the older adult.
- **Ask how you can help**~ It is important that the person’s right to self-determination is respected and your involvement empowers them. Ask them things like “How can I help” or “Are you comfortable with this plan?”

Reporting Abuse

The Office of the Public Guardian and Trustee (OPGT) is responsible for protecting older adults where mental capacity is in question. If you believe an older adult is incapable and is at-risk of abuse, you can contact the OPGT: 1 800 366 0335.

Other means of reporting suspected abuse include:

Long-Term Care ACTION Line: 1 866 434 0144 Retirement Homes Regulatory Authority: 1 855 275 7472
Ontario Provincial Police: 1 888 310 1122 Crime Stoppers: 1 800 222 TIPS (8477)

What To Do If Things Go Wrong

DISCUSSION:

What difficulties do you think you might have leaving an abusive situation?

If you are experiencing abuse, it is important to create a plan to keep you safe. There are services available to support you throughout this process. A service provider within your community can support you by developing a plan for your safety. The following are things to consider.

Tell your friends and family what is happening and let them know how they can help.

I will ask my neighbor _____ to call the police if they hear loud noises coming from the house.

Memorize important phone numbers or have them written down and kept in a safe place, so that in an emergency you can get help right away.

Once I am in a safe place I will call _____.

Know where all your important documents are kept and store them together in an emergency bag/folder, including any medical records, medication and other important necessities.

I will keep the emergency bag in _____.

Have a plan to leave the house if needed. Know where you could go if you need to leave (the closest neighbor/a friend's home you can drive to, or call the police).

If I have to leave the house I will _____.

Access community agencies to provide you with programs and services, to help keep you connected, including Meals-on-Wheels or friendly-visiting programs.

I will ask _____ to check in with me daily.

Who Do I Call if I Need Help?

Seniors Safety Line	1	866	299	1011
Advocacy Centre for the Elderly		416	598	2656
Assaulted Women's Helpline	1	866	863	0511
Elder Abuse Ontario	1	416	916	6728
Community Care Access Centre		310	2222	
Mental Health Line	1	866	531	2600
Law Society Referral Service	1	800	268	8326
Talk4Healing	1	855	554	4325
Victim Support Line	1	888	579	2888

Elder Abuse Tip Sheet

Examples of Abuse

Physical

Hitting, shaking, restraining, pulling hair.

Emotional

Name calling, not allowing visitors, threatening.

Financial

Stealing money, misusing power of attorney, forcing the sale of home and belongings.

Sexual

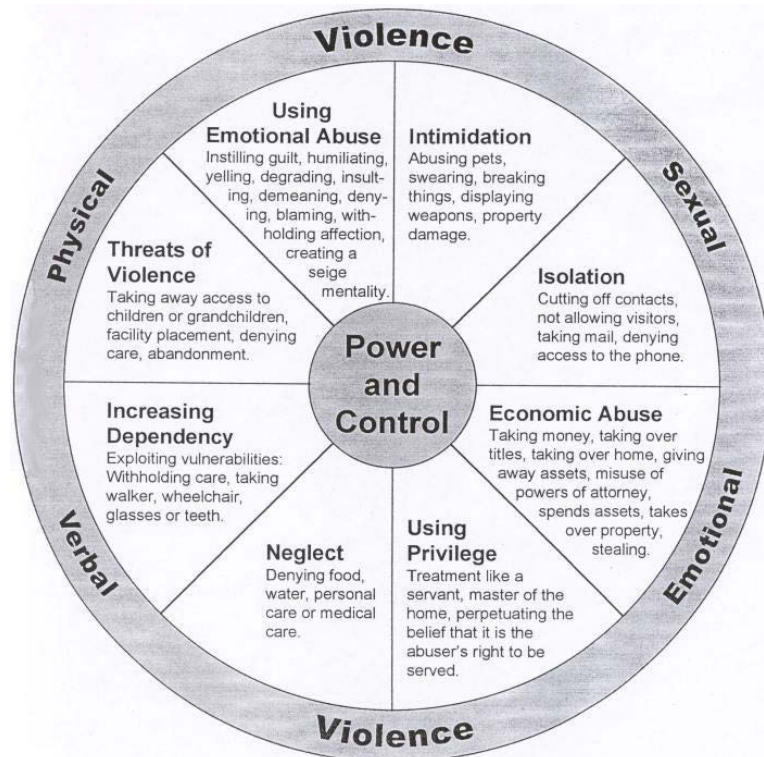
Any form of unwanted sexual activity.

Neglect

Denying basic needs of food, shelter, medication, clothing, and not providing a safe environment.

Spiritual

Restricting access to ceremony or other spiritual practices.



Adapted from: Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs (DAIP).

Know the Signs:

- Unexplained injuries, cuts bruises
- Poor hygiene
- Unexplained or sudden withdrawal of money from accounts
- Inappropriate clothing for the weather
- Care withheld or denied access to necessary services
- Fearfulness – Nervous around caregiver or other persons

What if it happened to a friend or family member?

Sometimes we must ask courageous questions in order to start the conversation. If you saw signs of abuse what would you say? What if someone told you they were being abused how would you react? Here are some tips to help you have courageous conversations:

- **Do not blame**~ Remember to stay away from phrases like 'how did you let this happen' or 'why didn't you stop this earlier?' People who experience abuse often feel guilty and it is important that we do not further isolate or blame the older adult.
- **Be empathetic**~ Family abuse and violence is confusing, there are often feelings of love for the abuser. This can be difficult to understand but it is important that we listen to these feelings and not judge the decisions of the older adult.
- **Ask how you can help**~ It is important that the person's self-determination is respected and they are empowered by your involvement. Ask them things like "How can I help" or "Are you comfortable with this plan?"

Reporting Abuse

The Office of the Public Guardian and Trustee (OPGT) is responsible for protecting mentally incapable people. If you believe an older adult is incapable and is at-risk of abuse, you can contact the OPGT: **1 800 366 0335**. **If you suspect or know abuse is taking place in a Retirement Home or Long Term Care homes, you are required to report the abuse.**

[Ministry of Health and Long Term Care ACTION Line](#): 1 866 434 0144

[Retirement Homes Regulatory Authority](#): 1 855 275 7472

[Ontario Provincial Police](#): 1 888 310 1122

[Crime Stoppers](#): 1 800 222 TIPS (8477)

Planning For Your Safety

Tell your friends and family what is happening and let them know how they can help.

I will ask my neighbour _____ to call the police if they hear loud noises coming from the house.

Memorize important phone numbers or have them written down and kept in a safe place,

So in an emergency you can get help right away. Once I am in a safe place I will call_____.

Know where all your important documents are kept and store them together in an emergency bag that has any medical records, medication and other important necessities.

I will keep the emergency bag in _____.

Have a plan to leave the house if needed, know where you can go if you need to leave; the closest neighbour, drive to a friend's house, or call the police.

If I have to leave the house I will _____.

Access community services to provide you with services and programs to help keep you connected, including Meals-on-Wheels or friendly-visiting programs.

I will ask _____ to check in with me daily

Who Do I Call if I Need Help?

Seniors Safety Line	1 866 299 1011
Advocacy Centre for the Elderly	1 855 598 2656
Assaulted Women's Helpline	1 866 863 0511
Elder Abuse Prevention Ontario	416 916 6728
Local Health Integration Networks	310 2222
Mental Health Line	1 866 531 2600
Law Society Referral Service	1 800 268 8326
Talk4Healing	1 855 554 4325
Victim Support Line	1 888 579 2888