



# Safety Planning for Older Adults: Keeping Safe in Unhealthy Relationships

TOOLKIT FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS



Elder Abuse  
Prevention  
Ontario

Ontario 



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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*This Toolkit was adapted in  
partnership with Alzheimer  
Society of Ontario*



## FOR MORE INFORMATION:



**Elder Abuse  
Prevention  
Ontario**



[www.eapon.ca](http://www.eapon.ca)



@EAPreventionON



416-916-6728



@EAPreventionON



[admin@eapon.ca](mailto:admin@eapon.ca)



@EAPreventionON

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# Safety Planning



## What is a Safety Plan?

A safety plan is an outline of actions that an older adult can put in place and follow to increase their safety. An older adult may be at risk from one or several different types of abuse from a caregiver or family member. A safety plan includes steps and strategies to help keep an older adult safe if they are in an unhealthy relationship. They can use the plan to prepare in advance for the possibility of (further) violence, as well as during and after a crisis situation.

When you are developing a safety plan with an older adult, try to make it practical, realistic and take into consideration their strengths and limitations. Think about how they can stay physically and emotionally safe. This means that the older adult knows what steps to take if a person says or does things that make them feel out of control and very upset.

## Supports in Planning

When making a safety plan, reach out to other community agencies for guidance and support such as a shelter, victim services, or home care support services. The safety plan should be tailored to meet the older adult's specific situation. Community support services working with older adults should ensure they:

- Maintain confidentiality (do not disclose personal information).
- Listen to their story.
- Believe the older adult and not make negative comments or judgments about their situation.

- Provide on-going reassurance that they are not alone.
- Maintain confidentiality (do not disclose personal information).
- Listen to their story.
- Believe the older adult and not make negative comments or judgments about their situation.
- Provide on-going reassurance that they are not alone.
- Ask what their goals are, what they want to do and why.
- Work together to explore options and ideas.
- Offer information and resources for the older adult and the abuser.
- Be realistic on how the agency can support the older adult in meeting their needs.

Safety planning is not a guarantee of safety. However, it can help older adults to talk, plan, think and prepare themselves to be safe. Safety planning is never final, because it is important to regularly check what their situation is and whether the safety plan is helping. As the situation changes, you should assist in modifying the safety plan with the older adult accordingly. Community support agencies should strive to ensure the plan is customized to reflect the older adult's needs as they change. (Seniors Rights Victoria- Safety Planning with Older People).





## Understanding Power and Control

An abusive person uses their power to take away another person's control over some or all parts of their life. For example, an abusive partner or family member may not let the older adult make their own decisions about where they go, who they see, or how they spend their money. If an older adult needs help to do something, and their caregiver, partner, power of attorney, or substitute decision maker refuses without a good reason, it may be a way of controlling and not respecting the older adult's right to make choices for themselves.

Developing a safety plan can help an older adult feel more in control. It can be an important step to help an older adult understand if a person is controlling and abusing them and how they can get help if needed. A safety plan can also help older adults feel more confident, with less fear and stress, because it helps them find ways to feel safer and more in control of their life. By making a plan, the older adult asserts their right to be treated with respect and dignity.





# Domestic Violence and Elder Abuse

## Forms of Abuse

### | Violence between intimate partners

Any form of physical, sexual, emotional, or psychological abuse, including financial control, harassment, and stalking. It occurs between opposite or same-sex intimate partners.

#### **Abusers:**

Any form of physical, sexual, emotional, or psychological abuse, including financial control, harassment, and stalking. It occurs between opposite or same-sex intimate partners.

### | Elder Abuse

One or many actions or lack of appropriate action, that harms an older person. It occurs in any relationship where one person is trusted or has authority to care for the older person. (WHO, 2002)

#### **Abusers:**

Partner, spouse, adult children, niece, nephew, grandchildren, other family members, non-family members such as paid caregivers, professionals.

### | Family violence

Family violence is any form of abuse that a child or adult experiences from any other family member. It is a type of abuse where one person uses their power to hurt and control someone who trusts and depends on them. This can also include neglect, where a family member who is supposed to provide care fails to meet a person's basic needs, such as food, health, cleaning, proper clothing, and housing.

#### **Abusers:**

Spouse or intimate partner, sister, brother, child, niece, nephew, or any other family member.





# Statistical Profile

Although the older population has the lowest rates (3%) of domestic violence when compared to younger groups, this is still a societal problem, with close to 3000 individuals over the age of 55 being victims of police-reported spousal violence in Canada in 2013. It's also important to note that, similar to younger age groups, a large number of older victims do not report the violence they experience.

In 2013, the rate of family-related violence among seniors aged 65 to 74 was 1.5 times higher than the rate for seniors aged 75 to 84 and double that reported for seniors 85 and older.

Similar to statistics of violence between younger Canadian partners, older women are affected more than older men. The rate of "family violence" against senior women in Canada was 62.7 women per 100,000, significantly higher than the rate for senior men at 49.7 per 100,000.

*Family Violence in Canada: A statistical profile, 2013. Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics*

A recent study of elder abuse in Canada, Into the Light : National Survey on the Mistreatment of Older Canadians (2015) found the prevalence of mistreatment was 8.2% which represents 766, 247 Canadians.

**2 in 10**  
**Canadian men are victims of abuse by family members**

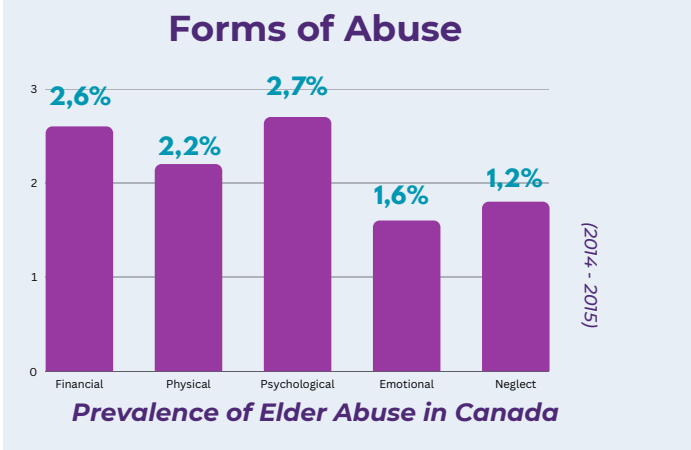


**Victimized by family**



**4 in 10**  
**Canadian women are victims of abuse by family members**

A recent study of elder abuse in Canada, Into the Light : National Survey on the Mistreatment of Older Canadians (2015) found the prevalence of mistreatment was 8.2% which represents 766, 247 Canadians.



### Perpetrators

The National Survey also found that the most common perpetrators for Psychological, Neglect and Physical Abuse was by spouse/ ex-spouse followed by a child or grandchild . In cases of sexual abuse older adults frequently reported person to sexually abuse was a friend followed by a spouse/ex-spouse.

# Warning Signs an Older Adult is living in an unhealthy relationship

“I thought this was something that happens to younger adults, not someone like me in their 70’s – not a grandmother”

“My daughter removed my phone, refuses to allow me to see my friends or family members alone and always follows me around wherever I go – she is so controlling”

## Warning Signs – Abusive Behaviour Unique factors or circumstances

- Controlling behaviour
- Speaking for a family member, at medical visits for example, answering questions and not letting the older adult talk
- Making all the decisions without asking
- Preventing visits with family and friends
- Threatening to leave, neglect or hurt
- Often being short-tempered or angry with the older adult
- Not respecting privacy
- Putting locks in the house, such as bedroom doors, to keep the older adult in or out
- Reading or withholding mail
- Controlling finances without permission or legal authority
- Blaming the older adult
- Treating the older adult like a child
- Belittling and name calling
- Leaving a dependent person alone for long periods of time



## Unique factors or circumstances that may prevent accessing help:

- Older adult may feel dependent on the person who is the abuser, so they feel there are no other options.
- Older adult is unable to talk about their unhappy feelings with the abuser, or they don't speak in the same language as the person causing harm.
- Older adult does not feel they can tell anyone because they feel ashamed or embarrassed that someone they loved, such as a spouse or family member, has harmed them.
- Older adult does not know about any support services that can help.

*See: It's Not Right-It's Not Right!  
Neighbours, Friends and Families for Older Adults*





## Red Flags of Possible Abuse by Family Member, Spouse/Partner

"You are not alone, abuse can happen to anyone at any age."

"It's never too late for a change in your life. Everyone has the right to live free from abuse and be treated with respect."

"All threats should be taken seriously, no matter how long ago they were made or if you think they are irrelevant. Help is available!"



- Forces the older adult to sign over the legal control of their property or health when they are capable of looking after these things themselves; forced to change their will, or to sign over the ownership of their home, or add them to their bank/credit card accounts.
- The substitute decision maker or power of attorney for property and/or personal care is not acting in the older adult's best interest, has not paid their bills, or provided enough money for food and necessary items.
- Demeans the older adult verbally or with gestures and/or calls names.
- Refuses older adult to have medication, food, water, or personal care items.
- Limits use of assistive devices (walker, cane, glasses, hearing aids).

- Hits, pushes, slaps, kicks, burns, pinches and/or restrains or locks older adult in a room.
- Makes older adult fearful or nervous when they are present.
- Takes money, property, or belongings without agreement or consent, lives with them, and refuses to pay their share of the rent/mortgage.
- Puts limits on their using the phone or having contact with other people.
- Forces older adult to take part in sexual activity, makes unwanted comments of a sexual nature, shows unwanted images of a sexual nature, or forces you to watch others engage in sexual activities.
- Yells, threatens, and makes fun of them.

# Domestic Violence Risk Factors

It is important to recognize risk factors that may put an older adult at higher risk of harm and abuse. These risk factors may be related to a history of domestic violence, or may have started recently.

**Risk factors which can indicate if a situation of domestic violence is getting worse and could lead to serious harm or death.**

*(Domestic Violence Lethality Factors)*

- A history of domestic violence.
- Actual or pending separation.
- Obsessive behaviors by abuser.
- Abuser is depressed.
- Level of violence is increasing.
- Prior threats/suicide attempts by abuser.
- Threat to kill.
- Prior attempts to isolate abused person.
- Abused person is uneasy or afraid (intuitive sense of fear).
- Abuser is unemployed.

*Ontario Domestic Violence Death Review Committee, 2012 Report*



## **Risk factors when no prior history of Domestic Violence.**

- Abuser has mental health issues - depression
- Social isolation
- Deteriorating health and loss of mobility
- Chronic cognitive and physical illnesses
- Older adults has disabilities and is dependent on other family/care providers
- Poverty
- Fear of being a burden, being separated, been sent to a 'home' increases vulnerability
- Lack of coordinated approach and services to support families, increases vulnerability
- Lack of respite for caregivers in situations of intensive care

# Legal Information About Calling To Police

Some forms of abuse are against the law. For example, hitting, slapping, or other intentional forceful contact with an older adult's body is assault. Attempting or threatening to assault someone is also a crime. If the police think an assault probably happened, they can arrest and charge a person with assault.

Sexual assault is when someone touches or threatens to touch another person in a sexual way directly or with an object when the other person does not agree or give consent or is incapable of giving consent.

A person can also be charged for sexually assaulting an older adult even if they are married spouses, common law partners or living together.

If an older adult is assaulted or afraid of being assaulted, they can call the police at 911. Anyone who thinks an assault has happened or may happen can also call the police. It may be helpful to talk to family members and a service provider to develop a safety plan for the survivor and accused older adults, if police lay charges.

It is important to know that in Ontario, if the police believe that a person has been assaulted or sexually assaulted by their current or former spouse/intimate partner, police must lay a criminal charge, even if the person who was assaulted does not want them to. This will mean that the person who is charged will be removed from the home, if they live with the assaulted person. In most cases after a person is charged with assault there cannot be any contact between the two parties involved in the assault until the police and possibly the court have dealt with the case.

It is important to inform older adults that they can talk to a senior's support worker, Victim Services, a shelter worker, or other community service if they have been assaulted or the police have laid charges.

Also provide older women with information about the free, 24-hour Assaulted Women's Helpline at: 1-866-863-0511 (TTY 1-866-863-7868), and inform them that they can ask for an interpreter for the language that best meets their communication needs.



# What Happend If The Police Are Called

## Investigation

Officers investigating a domestic violence occurrence shall conduct a thorough investigation with the purpose of determining if reasonable grounds exist for the laying of criminal charges and/or other charges.

The investigation of domestic violence occurrences shall include, but not be limited to:

- (a) the interviewing of all parties separately
- (b) the recording of statements including, but not limited to:
  - (i) victims;
  - (ii) neighbours;
  - (iii) children; and
  - (iv) accused persons;
- (c) the preservation of the crime scene, as necessary;
- (d) the collection of evidence



## If Charges are Laid Police will:

- Conduct interviews and obtain statements from accused persons, victims and witnesses
- Where applicable, score the Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment (O.D.A.R.A.)
- Provide support that may be necessary to ensure the safety of the victim(s), such as a Home Safety Plan
- Consider the risk implications for victim(s) as per the O.D.A.R.A. score
- Ensure that the victim(s) are kept informed of the status of the case as it progresses through court.
- If necessary Police will attend for a Keep the Peace



A photograph of an older couple standing on a sandy beach. The woman, on the left, has short blonde hair and wears glasses and a grey sweater. The man, on the right, is balding with a beard and wears a blue patterned button-down shirt. They are both smiling and embracing each other. The background shows the ocean and a clear sky.

## Taking the Journey

“The choices and options ahead will take you on a new path in life, on a journey leading to renewed safety and well-being”

### **Does the older adult want to stay in the relationship?**

Recognizing abuse and deciding whether the older adult wants to stay in the relationship with their partner or family member who is abusive is an important first step. It will also affect the details in their safety plan and what action steps to include to increase their safety.

- Do you want to stay with the person who is causing harm?
- Are you in the process of leaving or going back to the other person?
- Have you already ended the relationship?

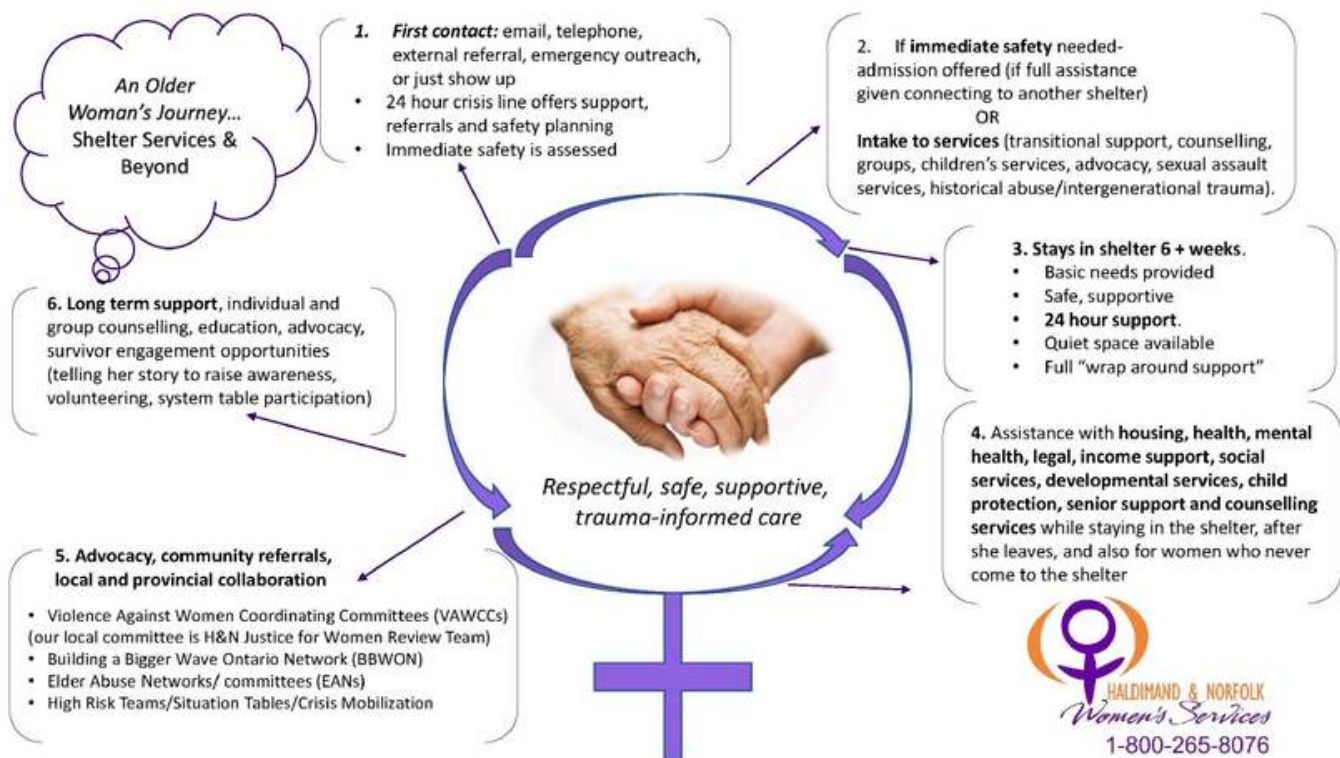
These can be difficult questions to ask, but it's important for preparing the safety plan. Remember, no one has control over another person's actions or how they treat people, including violent behaviours, towards the older adult or others.

"At my age 68, I was always worried about how I was going to be able to start over if I left, but I'm doing very well, I have freedom to do what I want and make my own decisions now. I know now that it is possible to make changes, even at my age."

Older adults however, do have control over how they want to respond to the situation to stay safe. They can decide if and when they want to tell others that they have been harmed, or that they may still be at risk. This is a very personal experience, only they can determine which path to take and when they want to take the journey. Some older adults may choose to continue to live in an unhealthy relationship while others may act immediately and leave. Whatever steps they take, keep in mind there are supports to help them along the way, including friends, family, neighbours, and community agencies. Taking this journey can happen if an older adult knows what is happening and how agencies can support them.



## An Older Woman's Journey Shelter Services & Beyond





# Considerations for Making a Safety Plan

There are some specific issues and questions that are important to talk about when you are working with an older adult to develop a safety plan. These discussions can help identify any barriers that may limit the effectiveness of their safety plan. Discussing these issues may also reveal additional information or supports the older adult needs to maintain their independence and safety

## Questions about Mental Health and Cognitive Ability to Make Decisions to Manage Personal Care and Property

- Has anyone told you that you are incapable of making decisions? If so, have you been assessed by a physician or capacity assessor?
- Do you have a Substitute Decision Maker or legal guardian?
- Have you prepared a Power of Attorney (POA) for Property and/or Power of Attorney for Personal Care?
- Do you have access to the documents? When was the last time you reviewed and/or updated your POA?
- If the person who has Power of Attorney is the abuser, discuss options of revoking the POA and make new legal documents if the older adult is capable of making this decision.



## Questions about Physical Health and Mobility

- If you have a physical disability, are there physical barriers in your environment that would prevent a safety exit or access to safety?
- Do you require any personal support to manage activities of daily living, such as bathing, making meals, dressing?

## Documentation and Personal Information

- Do you have papers about your legal status in Canada, including sponsorship, permanent residence (PR), or citizenship? (e.g. PR card, Birth Certificate, Passport)
- Do you have access to your personal records such as bank statements Birth Certificate?
- Do you have access to a mobile phone or vehicle?



## Steps to Support an Older Adult who is Living in an Abusive Relationship

**The following are concrete strategies to discuss with the older adult, to promote their safety.**

### | PREVENTION

- Ask your neighbours, friends and family to call the police if they hear sounds of abuse.
- Park your car by backing it into the driveway and keep it fueled.
- Hide your keys, cell phone and some money near your escape route.
- Create a list of safe places you can go to (family, friends, shelter).

### | SUPPORT

- Contact your local shelter or police, they may be able to provide you with a panic button/cell phone.
- Make a Safety Plan (visit women's shelter).
- Find out about resources in your community (call 211)

### | PROTECTION

- Don't go to a room where there is access to potential weapons (e.g. kitchen, workshop, bathroom).
- Got to a room where a door can be locked from inside, with a working phone available.
- If an argument is developing, move to a space where you can get outside easily.
- If you are being hurt, protect your face with your arms around each side of your head, with your fingers locked together.

### | NOTIFICATION

- Have a list of phone numbers to call for help.
- Call the police if it is an emergency (911).



# Steps to Support an Older Adult who is Thinking About Leaving an Abusive Relationship

The following are concrete strategies to discuss with the older adult in developing a safety plan, to promote their safety and well-being.

## | PREVENTION

- Do not tell your partner you are leaving.
- Consider contacting the police or a local women's shelter. Let the staff know that you intend to leave an abusive situation and ask for support in safety planning.
- Gather important documents: identification, bank cards, financial papers related to family assets, last Income Tax Return, keys, medication, doctor information, pictures of the abuser, passports, health cards, personal address/telephone book, cell phone, and legal documents (e.g. immigration papers, house deed/lease, restraining orders/peace bonds).
- If you can't keep these things stored in your home for fear your partner will find them, consider making copies and leave them with someone you trust. Your local women's shelter will also keep them for you.



## | PROTECTION

- Leave quickly.
- Put together pictures, jewelry and objects of sentimental value.
- Arrange with someone to care for your pets temporarily, until you get settled. A shelter may help with this.
- Remember to clear your phone of the last number you called.
- Have a back-up plan if your partner finds out where you are going.

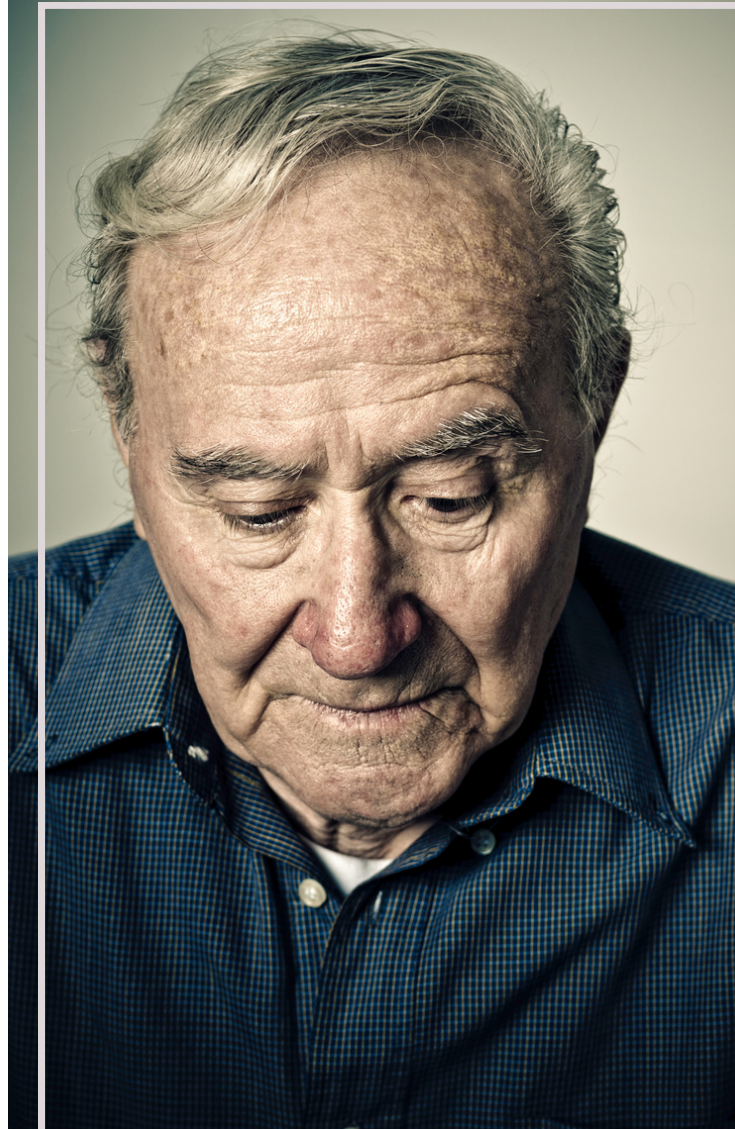


# Steps to Support an Older Adult who is Thinking About Leaving an Abusive Relationship

The following are concrete strategies to discuss with the older adult in developing a safety plan, to promote their safety and well-being.

## | NOTIFICATION

- If you are injured, go to a doctor or an emergency room and report what happened to you.
- Ask them to document your visit.
- Request a police escort or ask a friend, neighbour or family member to accompany you when you leave.
- Ask for an officer who specializes in domestic violence cases/elder abuse (information shared with the police may result in charges being laid against the abuser).
- Keep any evidence of physical abuse (such as photos).
- Keep a journal of all violent incidents, noting dates, events, threats and any witnesses.



## | SUPPORT

- Contact your local women's shelter. It may be a safer temporary spot than going to a place your partner knows.
- Consult a lawyer.







## Supporting an Older Adult who has Left and Ended an Abusive Relationship?

It is important to know that when an intimate relationship is ending, there is a greater risk of violence. Here are some safety suggestions to share in developing a safety plan with an older person after she or her partner has left the relationship and she is NOT living with her abuser.

### | PREVENTION

#### **Housing:**

- Go to a shelter.
- Attempt to find housing (even if temporary) that has adequate security: in a location that cannot be easily accessed from the street, doors with locks, locked front entranceway, etc.
- Consider living with someone else or in a shelter for a short time.
- If you are staying in your home, talk to a family lawyer. You may be able to change the locks on doors and/or install security measures such as additional locks, window bars, pole to wedge against doors, etc. Security can be increased by blocking sliding windows and placing barriers under door handles.
- Do not put your name in your apartment building directory.

#### **In Your Community:**

- If you live in the same neighbourhood as your abuser, or associate with the same group of people, tell the people who you trust that you have left/ended the relationship due to safety concerns. Tell them what you want them to do if they see your abuser approach you. If you feel unsafe walking alone, ask a neighbour, friend or family member, police or security guard to accompany you depending on the situation.
- Inform your neighbours that your abuser no longer lives with you and ask them to call the police if they see them near you or your house.
- Have secret code words with trusted family, neighbours or friends in case you need to contact them when your safety is at risk.
- Hide clothing and your Emergency Escape Plan items at a neighbour's house.



## Routines and Schedules:

- Consider changing your doctor, dentist and other professional services you would normally use. Or tell them about your concerns, and ask for a safety plan when you go to appointments. Change your appointment times, or request that your services be transferred to another office.
- Think about changing schedules and routes to avoid being found. Think about places and patterns that your abuser will know about and try to change them. For example, consider using a different grocery store or asking friends to meet you in different places.
- Try a different restaurant or shopping mall, and go at hours that are different, if your abuser knows your routine.
- Use Internet banking or use a different bank or branch, and change the day or time of errands, if you had and regular schedule.
- Inform any service providers that you have left a violent relationship and provide a description of your abuser.
- Don't be ashamed to ask for help or support. Your abuser may be less likely to intimidate, threaten or abuse you when others are around.
- Refuse to be alone with your abuser.



## NOTIFICATION

**If you are afraid your abuser might hurt you and you want the court to order them to stay away from you:**

If your abuser is your spouse or partner you live with, or used to be your spouse or partner you lived with, talk to a lawyer about what a Restraining Order is and what it can do.

If your abuser is not someone you married or a partner you have lived with, then ask the police about what a Peace Bond is and how to get one.

- Consult a lawyer or legal aid clinic about actions to protect yourself. Let your lawyer know if there are any Criminal Court proceedings.
- Consider applying for a restraining order or peace bond that may help keep your partner away from you. Keep it with you at all times, as part of a full safety plan.
- Provide police with a copy of any legal orders you have.
- Keep a copy of any protection orders (Restraining Order or Peace Bond) with you at all times. If you call the police to enforce it, they will ask to see a copy.
- Visit the closest police station and ask to speak to an officer who specializes in domestic violence/elder abuse cases.





## **| PROTECTION**

- Obtain an unlisted telephone number, get caller ID, and block your number when calling out.
- Access personal monitoring devices (i.e. LifeLine) or a cell phone.
- Keep emergency numbers on hand.
- Do not return to your home unless accompanied by someone who can help keep you safe, such as a trusted family member or the police.
- Consider telling your supervisor about your situation if you are working. If you are afraid your partner may hurt you at work and you tell your supervisor, your employer has a legal duty to take all reasonable steps to help keep you safe.
- Never confront the abuser.
- Carry a photo of the abuser.

### **How Can I Plan To Stay Safe When I Think My Situation Is Getting More Dangerous?**

- If I have an argument with the abusive person, I should try to remain calm and get to a room or area that has access to an exit.
- I should try to avoid bathrooms, kitchens, or anywhere where objects can be used as a weapon.
- If police come and I know there are weapons in the home, I should tell the police, including the types of weapons and how many are in the home.







## **| SUPPORT**

- Contact victim services, mental health services, and sexual assault centers for support and/or counseling.
- Learn about peer support programs to help talk about your feelings and work through possible solutions.
- Join social community groups/clubs to be active and engaged in the community.

**If drug or alcohol use occurs when I am afraid or being abused, I can increase my safety by taking preventative actions. I will try to remember that:**

- It is easier to keep safe when I am not using substances.
- Alcohol and drug use impairs my judgment and makes it harder for me to choose safe options and access services.
- It can be hard for me to ask for help when I am using drugs or drinking.

**If you get assistance from community agencies to help support your mental health or substance use issues, you should consider:**

- Keeping phone numbers of supportive professionals
- Writing down the names and phone numbers of your advocate/supports
- Listing your medications, doses, and when you take each medication
- Making sure this personal information is stored with other important documents

Adapted from:

Safety Plan for Victims of Violence-Victim Services of Bruce Grey and Owen Sound Safety Planning for Women who are Abused Neighbours, Friends and Families







### **| FINANCIAL INFORMATION:**

Even if you have never worked, you can take one-half of the funds in a joint chequing or savings account with your spouse or partner. If you don't take any money from the accounts, he/she can take all the money and/or close the account, and you may not get your share until the court rules on it, if ever.

If you take money out of a joint account, you should talk to a family lawyer right away. It is a good idea to talk to a family lawyer if you are ending a relationship, to find out and protect your rights to any family property, including your family home, a second property such as a cottage or condominium or time-share, bank accounts, pensions, and other things.





## Emotional Support

- You can make a list of supportive friends or family and you can call them if you are feeling down or need support.
- You can join a cultural or faith-based group, for friends and support.
- You can work on reducing your need for help from the abuser, for example by arranging home care services.
- You can join a community visitor or telephone chat program.
- Consider calling your local victim services, the senior safety line or Elder Abuse Network for more information.
- Try to express your needs and wants with others in a firm and deliberate way.
- Try to keep and maintain positive thoughts about yourself.
- Identify individuals who you can talk freely, honestly and openly with and who can provide the support you need in a thoughtful and respectful way.
- Make learning about yourself and your relationship important to you.
- Attend a support group. Emotional Support.

*Adapted from: Seniors Rights Victoria- Safety Planning with Older People*

# How Do I Keep Myself Emotional Safe and Healthy?



Self-esteem, that is feeling good about myself, and thinking I deserve to feel safe and treated with respect, is one of the most important factors to maintaining good mental health. It is about how we value our place in the community and our contributions to society and our relationships.

Often low self-esteem can negatively affect our lives. It can affect our body and how we feel. It can also affect our relationships with others in our lives.

## Signs of low self-esteem are:

- Trouble sleeping, or feeling very tired
- Feeling dizzy or sweaty when you meet others
- More aware of your body's responses, such as blushing
- Overeating or not having an appetite a lot of the time
- Always try hard to be perfect
- Having difficulty making decisions and holding back from speaking out or sharing your opinion





# Safety Planning for Older Adults with Cognitive Impairment



## WHAT IS DEMENTIA?

Dementia is an overall term for a set of symptoms that are caused by disorders affecting the brain. Symptoms may include memory loss, and difficulties with thinking, problem-solving or language, severe enough to reduce a person's ability to perform everyday activities. A person with dementia may also experience changes in mood or behaviour. Dementia is not a specific disease.

Many diseases can cause dementia, including Alzheimer's disease, vascular dementia (due to strokes), Lewy Body disease, head trauma, fronto-temporal dementia, Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, Parkinson's disease, and Huntington's disease. These conditions can have similar and overlapping symptoms.

To learn more visit: <http://alzheimer.ca/en/on/About-dementia/What-isdementia>

# DEMENTIA IN CANADA



**564,000**

Canadians living with Dementia.

**1 IN 5**



Canadians have experience caring for someone living with some form of Dementia.



**25,000**

The number of new cases of dementia diagnosed every year.

**AFFECTED**

**1.1 M**

The number of Canadians affected directly or indirectly by the disease.



**FUTURE IMPACT**

**937,000**

The number of Canadians who will be living with the disease in 15 years.



**65%**

Of those diagnosed with dementia over the age of 65 are women.



# Ten Warning Signs

Whether you're experiencing possible symptoms or concerned for someone you care about, the Alzheimer Society of Ontario has developed the following list of signs to look for:



1. Memory loss affecting day-to-day abilities – forgetting things often or struggling to retain new information.
2. Difficulty performing familiar tasks – forgetting how to do something you've been doing your whole life, such as preparing a meal or getting dressed.
3. Problems with language – forgetting words or substituting words that don't fit the context.
4. Disorientation in time and space – not knowing what day of the week it is or getting lost in a familiar place.
5. Impaired judgment – not recognizing a medical problem that needs attention or wearing light clothing on a cold day.
6. Problems with abstract thinking – not understanding what numbers signify on a calculator, for example, or how they're used.
7. Misplacing things – putting things in strange places, like an iron in the freezer or a wristwatch in the sugar bowl.
8. Changes in mood and behaviour – exhibiting severe mood swings from being easy-going to quick-tempered.
9. Changes in personality – behaving out of character such as feeling paranoid or threatened.
10. Loss of initiative – losing interest in friends, family and favourite activities.

*(Adapted from: O'Connor, D. & Donnelly, M. (2009)*







# Older Adults with Dementia - Risk for Abuse

"People with dementia are more vulnerable to situations of abuse and neglect. On the one hand, increasing dependency on others and deteriorating social networks leave the person more isolated, creating a context that is ripe for becoming abusive. Simultaneously, cognitive difficulties interfere with the ability to take action—for example, the person may have difficulty organizing to leave or seek support" (O'Connor, D. & Donnelly, M. (2009, p. 107).

## Risk Factors

Chronic disease and a progressive decline in activities of daily living and cognitive function heighten the risk of older adult abuse. Diminishing cognitive function has a significant impact since it may lead to disruptive behaviour on the part of the care receiver (Cooper, C., Selwood, A. & Livingston, G., 2009).

Research has also shown that caregivers report not only their fears of becoming violence with the older adult they are caring for, but also admit to being verbally, physically abusive and neglectful (NCEA, 2017). It is important to plan and support with older adults who are living with dementia to decrease their vulnerability to abusive situations.

## Barriers to Reporting/Disclosing Abuse

- Diminished capacity to comprehend.
- Ignorance of the law.
- Cultural differences.
- Shame and fear when the perpetrator is a family caregiver.
- Fear of placement in a care facility.
- A socio-culture norm that discourages involvement of outsiders in family matters.
- Belief that there is little that police or social agencies can do to help.

# Communication Tips with Older Adults with Cognitive Impairments

- Introduce yourself – don't make the assumption that they will be able to recall your name if they are a long time client/customer
- Speak clearly and slowly – allow the person additional time to process what you are saying. It can take a person living with dementia 7 times longer to process information



- Use short, simple sentences – avoid asking open-ended questions. Instead try to provide the person with choices (e.g. would you like the \_\_\_\_\_ or the \_\_\_\_\_?)
- Be aware of your non-verbal messages: facial expressions, tone of voice, gestures, eye contact
- Be patient, reduce distractions, listen – give the person your undivided attention, show respect
- Provide visual cues/landmarks if you are giving directions. Label items such as the emergency bag, have a clear written plan to aid with memory
- If you are on the phone with a person with dementia you can use many of the same strategies as listed above: ask people to look for items you need them to reference, ensure you are speaking slowly and clearly, take notes so you can put the clues together, ask them to repeat, and take their time as needed





A photograph of three men of different ethnicities standing together outdoors, smiling. The man on the left is white with grey hair, wearing a dark green polo shirt. The man in the middle is Black with grey hair and a mustache, wearing a light blue polo shirt. The man on the right is white with grey hair, wearing a yellow shirt under a blue V-neck sweater. They are standing in front of a white building with green shutters. A purple rectangular box is overlaid on the bottom left of the image, containing the title 'Shelters and Transitional Homes' in white text.

# Shelters and Transitional Homes

## WHAT IS AN EMERGENCY SHELTER/TRANSITION HOUSE?

It is a safe and welcoming home that accommodates women and their children when they are fleeing violence. Shelter addresses are kept confidential so that women (and children) cannot be found. They can generally stay for up to 30 days and sometimes longer and there are no charges to stay there. Shelters provide critical support services that will help women make their transition to a life free of abuse.

Shelter workers liaise with a number of providers in the community to help women and their children and ensure that they have counseling support and health care.

Staff and volunteers at shelters are there to listen, to offer emotional support, information and referrals to other services a woman may need such as legal, financial, medical and housing. In many homes, staff will help with transportation to appointments. The women residents generally share household tasks and cooking.

## WHAT IS SECOND-STAGE HOUSING?

Second-stage houses provide short-term, safe, affordable, supportive and independent housing and some services similar to those provided in shelters/transition houses. Women and their children can usually stay at a Second Stage House for 6 months to a year in furnished units. Rent is geared to your income and there are generally no costs for the programs.

*(Adapted from [www.oaith.ca](http://www.oaith.ca))*

## Ontario Association of Interval & Transition Houses

There are 96 emergency violence against women shelters that offer a range of supports, services and advocacy for women and their children fleeing violence:

- \* 24 Hour Support and Crisis Lines
- \* Safe Emergency Shelter
- \* Counselling Programs
- \* Referrals to Community Resources
- \* Transitional and Second Stage Housing Programs
- \* Legal Support and Advocacy with Family, Criminal Law and Immigration Law
- \* Children and Youth Programs
- \* Violence Prevention Programs
- \* Women's Community Outreach Support

### Shelter Safe

An on-line map is available at [sheltersafe.ca](http://www.sheltersafe.ca) to help women find a shelters located in communities across Ontario. Agencies can assist older adults by searching locations that older adult would like to move to temporarily to stay safe. For more information go to: <http://www.sheltersafe.ca/find-help/>



# Support and Services Available to Help Older Adults



## Victim Services:

### Assaulted Women's Helpline

1-866-863-9511

TTY Mobile: 1-866-863-7868

(Fido, Rogers, Bell, Telus)

#SAFE (#7233)

### Fem'aide

1-877-336-2433

TTY: 1-866-860-7082

### Seniors Safety Line

1-866-299-1011

### Victim Support Line

1-888-579-2888

## Health Care and Support Services:

### Alzheimer Society of Ontario

1-800-879-4226

### Community Care Access Centre

310-2222

### Canadian Hearing Society

1-877-347-3427

### Elder Abuse Ontario

416-916-6728

### Rainbow Health Ontario

1-416-324-4100

### Victim Support Line

1-888-579-2888

### Talk4Healing

1-855-554-4325

For more resources visit: <https://eapon.ca/>

## **Law Enforcement and Government Agencies:**

### **Senior Crime Stoppers**

1-800-222-TIPS (8477)

### **Ontario Provincial Police**

1-888-310-1122

## **Advocacy & Legal Advice:**

### **Advocacy Centre for the Elderly (ACE)**

1 855-598-2656

### **Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic**

1-416-323-9149

*(for women affected by violence in GTA region)*

### **Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario**

1-866-598-0322

### **Law Society Referral Service**

1-855-947-5255

### **Justice Net**

1-866-919-3219

*(reduced fees for low income people who do not qualify for Legal Aid)*

### **Legal Aid Ontario**

1-800-668-8258

### **Ontario Ombudsman**

1-800-263-1830

### **Ontario Human Rights Commission**

1-800-387-9080

## **Mandatory Reporting of Abuse of Older Persons in Care:**

### **Long-Term Care ACTION Line**

1-866-434-0144

### **Retirement Homes Regulatory Authority**

1-855-275-7472

TTY: 416-314-2687

### **Office of the Public Guardian and Trustee**

1-800-366-0335

## **24 Hour Support or Crisis Lines:**

### **Assaulted Women's Help Line**

1-866-863 -0511

### **Mental Health Helpline**

1-866-531-2600

### **Ontario Network of Sexual Assault/Domestic Violence Treatment Centres**

1-416-323-7327

### **Support for Male Survivors**

1-866-887-0015



# Helpful Websites



## **Advocacy Centre for the Elderly**

[www.advocacycentreelderly.org](http://www.advocacycentreelderly.org)

## **Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic**

[www.schliferclinic.com](http://www.schliferclinic.com)

## **Community Legal Education Ontario**

[www.cleo.on.ca](http://www.cleo.on.ca) | [www.yourlegalrights.ca](http://www.yourlegalrights.ca)

## **Elder Abuse Prevention Ontario**

[www.eapon.ca](http://www.eapon.ca)

## **Family Legal Information Centres (FLICs)**

FLICs offer free assistance and information for clients who are either new to the court system or who don't have a lawyer. Help with issues related to separation and divorce and other family law matters.

[www.attorneygeneral.jus.gov.on.ca/english/family/infoctr.php](http://www.attorneygeneral.jus.gov.on.ca/english/family/infoctr.php)

## **Francophone Legal Advice Lines**

French-speaking clients can get free, confidential advice and referrals by telephone for many of the legal issues covered by community legal clinics. Four advice lines are available in:

Northern Ontario 1-877-687-2847

Southwestern Ontario 1-855-650-9716

Eastern Ontario. 1-877-500-4508

Greater Toronto Area... 1-877-966-7345

[www.legalaids.on.ca/en/contact/flapp.asp](http://www.legalaids.on.ca/en/contact/flapp.asp)

## **It's Not Right- Neighbours, Friends and Families**

Ontario is changing the conversation to stop abuse of older adults. In January 2017, the Ministry of Seniors Affairs, Elder Abuse Ontario and Western University launched a provincial initiative to educate Ontarians as bystanders to recognize warning signs and learn how to respond to elder abuse.

[www.itsnotright.ca](http://www.itsnotright.ca)

# Helpful Websites



## **JusticeNet**

The program includes a publicly available online directory of participating professionals, as well as a telephone-based service.

[www.justicenet.ca](http://www.justicenet.ca)

## **Law Society Referral Service**

[www.lsuc.on.ca/lrs/](http://www.lsuc.on.ca/lrs/)

## **Local Community Legal Clinics**

[www.legalaid.on.ca/en/contact/contact.asp?type=cl](http://www.legalaid.on.ca/en/contact/contact.asp?type=cl)

## **METRAC**

METRAC works with individuals, communities and institutions to change ideas, actions and policies with the goal of ending violence against women and youth. METRAC's Community Justice Program provides accessible, multi-language legal information and training about laws important for women affected by violence.

[www.metrac.org](http://www.metrac.org)

## **Ontario Association of Interval & Transition Houses**

[www.oaith.ca](http://www.oaith.ca)

## **Ontario Network of Sexual Assault/Domestic Violence Treatment Centres**

Comprised of 35 hospital-based centres that provide 24/7 emergency care to women, children and men who have been sexually assaulted or who are victims or survivors of domestic violence (intimate partner) abuse. Services include: emergency medical and nursing care, crisis intervention, collection of forensic evidence, medical follow-up and counselling and referral to community resources.

[www.satcontario.com](http://www.satcontario.com)

## **Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres**

[www.sexualassaultsupport.ca](http://www.sexualassaultsupport.ca)

## **Ontario Women's Justice Network**

[www.owjn.org](http://www.owjn.org)

## **Support Services for Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse**

[www.attorneygeneral.jus.gov.on.ca/english/ovss/male\\_support\\_services/](http://www.attorneygeneral.jus.gov.on.ca/english/ovss/male_support_services/)



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**Elder Abuse  
Prevention  
Ontario**

## **Elder Abuse Prevention Ontario (EAPO)**

### **For more information:**



416-916-6728



admin@eapon.ca



[www.eapon.ca](http://www.eapon.ca)



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