

# Abuse of the Elderly

---

Abuse of the older adult is:

*Any act or omission by a person in trust, a family member, friend, caregiver, or neighbour, which causes harm to a senior.*

## What causes abuse of the Elderly?

There is no single cause. Many factors may lead to inadequate care and abuse, including stress and the lack of understanding of the changing needs and roles of the elderly. No one should jump to conclusions, but signs and symptoms should be taken seriously. What sometimes seems to be self-neglect or a medical condition may turn out to be abuse of the elderly.

## How can you recognize abuse?

Elder Abuse is a hidden problem and few people feel comfortable talking about it. In fact, abused seniors often refuse to report abuse, and when they do, they may be called demanding, confused or senile. You may not recognize the signs of physical or psychological abuse because they are also signs of other medical conditions.

## Forms of Abuse

### **Physical Abuse:**

Acts of physical force used against an older person which may include: slapping; pushing; shaking; hitting; rough handling; restraining. Watch for: bruises, welts, burns, repeated falls, cuts and marks.

### **Emotional/Psychological Abuse:**

This form of abuse may include: threatening; bullying; calling names; humiliating; or any treatment which may diminish the sense of identity, dignity, and self-worth. Psychological abuse is hard to detect. Symptoms may include withdrawal, depression, anxiety, or fear, tearfulness or excessive deference of/to caregivers.

### **Financial Abuse:**

Financial abuse includes: withholding money; being forced to sell property or possessions; demanding changes in wills; misuse of Power of Attorney for Property. There may be financial abuse if seniors are denied food, clothing or other necessities which they can afford. Indicators could include: sudden changes in a senior's will; unusual withdrawals from a senior's bank account, or sudden inability to pay bills.

### **Sexual Abuse:**

Any sexual behaviour directed towards an older adult without that person's full knowledge and consent.

### **Caregiver Support**

Counselling and support is also available for care-givers who find themselves vulnerable as a result of accumulating stressors such as job uncertainty or loss, financial strains, multiple demands on their care-giving energy or family crises.

### **Where can I turn for help?**

Anyone involved in an abusive situation may obtain information, counselling or support from a doctor, member of the clergy, social worker, family therapist, public health nurse, police officer or lawyer.

For more information, call your local Northwestern Health Unit office.