

Seniors' Caregiver Handbook

Section 13

Elder Abuse

Elder Abuse - an act or threat of harm to an elderly person caused by a family member, friend or anyone on whom the victim relies for basic needs.

Someone who commits elder abuse usually has control or influence over the older person and is trusted by the older person. Most victims of elder abuse depend on the people who hurt them, sometimes for food, shelter, personal care, or companionship. A family member, friend, neighbour, or staff in group residential settings or long-term health care facilities can cause the abuse. Many victims of abuse are isolated from their friends, neighbours, and other family members. There are community resources available for victims of elder abuse.

There are four categories of abuse:

1. Institutional maltreatment
2. Alcohol, drug abuse
3. Verbal, physical & psychological
4. Exploitation and financial abuse

The extent of abuse in elderly populations is scant. The elderly are particularly at risk of abuse in institutions such as hospitals, nursing homes and other long-term care facilities. Abusive acts within institutions for the elderly include physically restraining patients, depriving them of dignity and choice over daily affairs and providing insufficient care.

For older people, the consequences of abuse can be especially serious because their bones are more brittle and convalescence takes them longer.

Social isolation is a significant risk factor for a senior to suffer mistreatment. Many seniors are isolated because of physical or mental infirmities, or through the loss of friends and family members.

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A range of abusive behaviours can occur. These include physical and sexual abuse, emotional or psychological abuse, financial abuse and neglect.

Abuse can result from:

- caregiver stress
- impairment of the senior
- existing violence in a family
- personal problems of the abusers

Sources of Help

- Abuse Prevention Protocol Toronto- CCAC 416-222-2241
- Advocacy Centre for the Elderly 416-598-2656
- Community Care Access Centre 416-504-9888
- Community Legal Clinics - Legal Information Ontario 416-929-5500

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- Community Policing Support Unit:
 - a) Elder Abuse and Mental Health 416-808-7044
 - b) Victim Services Program of Toronto 416-808-7066
- Family Doctors - College of Physicians and Surgeons 416-967-2600
- Geriatric Day Hospital and Outreach - Sunnybrook and
- Women's College Health Sciences Centre 416-480-4033
- Home Support and Respite Care Services - SPRINT 416-481-6411
- (Income Security Programs) 1-800-277-9914
- Human Resources Development Canada
- Law Society of Upper Canada –
- Lawyer Referral Service 416-947-3330
- Office of the Public Guardian and Trustee 416-314-2800
- POINT Community Information Service 416-487-2427
- Toronto Public Health 416-392-0962
- Visiting Nurses - VON - Toronto/York Region 416-499-2009

To report abuse in nursing homes and Homes for the Aged, call the Central Regional Office - 416-327-8952 - Long Term Care Division, Ministry of Health or Concerned Friends - 416-489-0146.

Under the Criminal code, persons can be charged with fraud, theft, neglect, assault, and abuse of power of attorney. Some signs and symptoms of abuse are:

- changes in dress
- poor hygiene
- rashes, pressure sores
- depression
- fear, anxiety
- change in behaviour

Guidelines for Management of the Suspected Abuse

1. Assess the severity of the situation
2. Determine the presence of other forms of abuse

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3. Assess whether there is a crime being committed - does the victim need temporary shelter? Is the victim in need of protection?
4. Determine the need for counselling or seek consultation as needed
5. Establish competency of the victim through formal assessment
6. Determine the ability of the Caregiver to provide care
7. Determine if the act is intentional

Procedure as used by the Community Care Access Centre

1. Advise victim about options. The victim must agree to the action plan and be willing to participate in the plan.
Educate and provide support to the Caregiver
2. Collect evidence thoroughly before initiating actions
3. Assess the necessity to freeze victim's bank account in consultation with the bank or financial planner
4. Advise and inform victim about all alternative actions - legal aid, trustees and legal options
5. Enlist support of family, friends, neighbours or witnesses to provide protection.
6. Inform victim about relevant community resources i.e. education, and advocacy and provide support
7. Consider placing victim in a safer environment
8. Determine whether victim needs accompaniment or a transportation service
9. Monitor situation until abuse stops

The Metro Toronto Police Elder Abuse Co-ordinator advises:

1. Know the rights granted under the Ontario Human Rights Code, the Canadian Human Rights code, the Nursing Home Act and the Hospital Act.
2. Check with a lawyer or with the Public Trustee's office on all matters related to the power of attorney
3. Have pension cheques and other income deposited directly into Care-Receiver's bank account
4. Anticipate possible problems of moving care-receiver into your home

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If you think abuse is occurring, seek help from a public health nurse, social worker, doctor, lawyer, clergy or the police.

Some public agencies for help:

Emergency - police – 911

police communications – 416-324-2222

Legal services – advocacy centre for the elderly 416-487-7157

Referral & Information

- POINT 416-487-2390

- Seniors' Information Service 416-480-1393

Counselling - Family Services Association 416-480-1393

- Jewish Family & Child Services 416-638-7800

- Catholic Family Services 416-362-2481

Toronto Public Health - 416-338-7600

Public Health Nurses – Toronto 416-392-7641

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Your Notes - Section 13