

Elder Abuse Defined

Any deliberate action or lack of action that causes harm to an older adult is elder abuse.

Who's at risk?

Every case is unique, with different facts. Risk factors are many and various, possibly including:

- > a history of abuse between family members
- > dependency, e.g., being dependent on other family members
- > stress, caused by various factors
- > alcohol or drug use
- > greed
- > lack of knowledge about the degree of care and needs of an older person
- > lack of respect given to older people in a society that values youth, self-reliance, and energy
- > lack of professional awareness about the problem of elder abuse, so that it might continue undetected

What Is Abuse? Types, Examples, and Indicators

Physical Abuse

Examples	Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none">> pushing> pulling> threatening> confining> failing to provide> forcing or withholding medication> forced sexual activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">> unexplained injuries; rope or belt marks; injury to scalp> frequent medical visits or delay in seeking treatment> history of accidents or injuries; repeated falls> depression, fear> signs of anxiety

NOTE: Some of these indicators may be present and the older adult is not being abused; these are merely **possible** examples and indicators of abuse.

Financial and/or Material Abuse

Examples	Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none">> stealing> forcing to change a will> misusing credit cards> forging a signature> withholding money> forcing or tricking> pressuring> refusing to return money or property> abusing powers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">> confused about finances> signing a document without knowing the consequences> lack of financial choices> family members moving in> unusual bank or ATM activity> income and standards misfit> possessions disappearing> sudden difficulty in paying bills> refusing to spend money without “permission”

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ALSO NOTE: These actions may or may not be happening at the same time as other abuse (e.g., physical or psychological). The abuser could be perfectly pleasant and claiming to act in the older adult’s best interest while taking advantage of him/her financially. It may take some time before anyone realizes what is happening, and the older adult may be the only one who sees it.

Psychological Abuse

Examples	Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none">> making threats> eroding self-esteem> yelling or scolding> manipulating> forcing socialization or isolation> treating someone like a child> refusing access> not allowing someone to make decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">> becoming withdrawn, agitated, depressed> unusual weight gain or loss> unexplained paranoia> reluctance to talk openly> making inconsistent statements> appearing nervous> waiting for caregiver to respond> noticeable behaviour changes> low self-esteem> sleeping or not> making excuses

NOTE: Some of these indicators may be present and the older adult is not being abused; these are merely *possible* examples and indicators of abuse.

Neglect and/or Self-Neglect Abuse

Examples	Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none">> withholding care> failing to provide> inadequate supervision, lack of safety precautions> withholding medical services> unattended or restrained over time> failing companionship, social interaction, or intellectual stimulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">> malnutrition, dehydration> not meeting necessities of life> medical treatment withheld> pattern of cancellations; avoiding appointments> lack of access to care> lack of required aids; lack of safety features> left alone> signs of being tied up> poorly maintained living space> untidy appearance; poor hygiene, unpleasant odour

NOTE: Some of these indicators may be present and the older adult is not being abused; these are merely **possible** examples and indicators of abuse.

Medication Abuse

Examples	Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none">> misuse of medications, prescriptions or mood altering substances> over-medication> not providing adequate or appropriate medication when needed or when prescribed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">> reduced activity> unusual behaviour> failure to fill prescriptions> reduced beneficial response from medications> depression> making inconsistent statements> appearing confused

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ON ELDER ABUSE

- > The Centre for Public Legal Education Alberta has several resources on elder abuse. See the Oak-Net website at www.oaknet.ca/abuse.