



# Types of Abuse and Neglect

Abuse and neglect of older adults can take many forms, including physical, emotional, financial, sexual, and spiritual.

**Physical abuse** includes violence or rough treatment, even if it does not leave an injury. It can also be a threat of physical force. A push that might not hurt a younger person can be very harmful to an older adult. Physical abuse also includes inappropriate use of medications or restraints.

**Emotional abuse** includes name calling, intimidation, threats, yelling, ignoring, or socially isolating the older person. Emotional abuse is often a form of control. Treating an older adult “like a child” is another form of emotional abuse. Emotional abuse can cause emotional pain, anguish, or distress. It can undermine an older person's sense of dignity and self-worth. Emotional abuse is also known as verbal, mental, or psychological abuse.

**Financial abuse** is the most common form of abuse of older adults. It can involve illegally or improperly using a person's money, assets, or property without the person's permission or knowledge. It is often a form of theft or fraud. Examples of financial abuse include: pressuring for money, goods or property; using property or money without the person's knowledge and consent; and misusing a power of attorney.

**Sexual abuse** is sexual contact with an older adult without that person's consent. It can include pressuring an older adult for intimacy, fondling, touching, and sexual assault. Sexual abuse can also include sexual comments or jokes, or leering.

**Violations of rights** means ignoring older adults' entitlement to basic rights and freedoms that other adults often take for granted. Violation of rights may include restricting visitors, or restricting the person's liberty, freedom, rights to privacy, and access to information or available community supports. Violation of rights can also include making decisions about the older adult's health, personal care, or finances without the person's consent (or where the person is not capable, his or her chosen



substitute decision maker). In some cases, rules or policies may violate an older adult's rights.

**Spiritual abuse or neglect** means restriction or loss of a person's spiritual practices, customs, or traditions. It also includes using an older person's religious or spiritual beliefs to exploit them; attacking a person's spiritual beliefs; and not allowing the older person to attend the church, synagogue, or temple of his or her choice.

**Neglect** can be physical, emotional, or financial. It refers to situations where a person has a responsibility to provide care or assistance to an older adult, but does not. For example, a neglectful caregiver might stop paying the bills or providing food, shelter, medication, medical attention, or other forms of assistance that the older adult needs and cannot get on his or her own. Abandoning the person is another form of neglect.

## **Abuse is a Crime**

Many types of abuse or neglect are crimes under the Criminal Code of Canada. These include theft (including theft by a person who has been given power of attorney); fraud; assault; sexual assault; criminal intimidation and harassment; failing to provide a dependent person with the necessities of life; and manslaughter or murder.

### Sources:

Canadian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse "What is Senior Abuse?" and "Canadian Laws on Abuse and Neglect."

Department of Justice Canada "Abuse of Older Adults: A Fact Sheet."

Ontario Seniors' Secretariat, "What You Need to Know about Elder Abuse."

Dumont-Smith, C. (2002). "Aboriginal Elder Abuse in Canada," (Aboriginal Healing Foundation).

National Clearinghouse on Family Violence, Family Violence Prevention Unit "Abuse of Older Adults in Institutions." and "When a Home is not a Home- Abuse and Neglect in Long Term Care."