

What is Elder Abuse?

Elder abuse can take many different forms. The most common forms of elder abuse are financial abuse and neglect.

Elder physical abuse

Physical abuse describes any deliberate act that causes pain for, injury to, or intimidation of, an older person. This includes all forms of physical assault, along with the use of restraint by physical or chemical methods.

Elder psychological / emotional abuse

Psychological or emotional abuse involves any action or threat that causes fear of violence, isolation, deprivation, humiliation or powerlessness.

For example, treating the elder like a child, preventing access to services, making threats (such as preventing them from seeing loved ones) or telling them they have dementia.

Elder social abuse

Social abuse is forced isolation that prevents or restricts the older person's contact with friends, family or the community.

This could involve withholding or controlling mail or phone calls, preventing them from attending religious or cultural events, or taking over their home without consent. Social isolation often allows other forms of abuse to take place.

Elder financial abuse

This is the illegal, mismanagement or improper use of the older person's finances.

This includes stealing money or possessions, controlling their finances without permission, threats or coercion to gain Power of Attorney or pressuring them for early inheritances.

Elder sexual abuse

Any sexual contact, language or display of pornography without the older person's consent, or through coercion.

For example, making obscene phone calls in the person's presence, inappropriate handling when undertaking personal care activities, or making the person perform a sexual act they don't want.

Elder neglect

Neglect involves the failure of a carer to provide basic necessities such as food, shelter, or medical care, or preventing someone else from providing them.

What elder abuse is not

Age discrimination, or an estranged relationship with a relative are not examples of elder abuse.

Elder abuse is also not a crime committed by a stranger. It does not involve self-neglect or self-mistreatment – rather, the abuse happens at the hands of a trusted person.

While elder abuse is now receiving increased attention and research, there are no easy solutions to identify and address this heartbreaking problem.

When is elder abuse likely to occur?

Some of the possible risk factors for elder abuse include situations where:

- the carer is experiencing high levels of stress, for example, health or financial pressures
- the older person is unable to stop or report abuse due to cognitive impairment or physical limitations
- there is isolation as a result of location, cultural or language barriers, or health complications
- the carer or older person is dealing with addiction
- the carer or older person is dependent on the other person for support, for example, financially, socially, or physically.

What should I do if I'm being exploited or mistreated?

The first priority is your safety. If you feel threatened or unsafe, call 000. The police can assist you in removing an abusive person from your home, or help you to find safe accommodation.

If you decide to stay in the situation, having a safety plan can help you know what to do in an emergency.

Finding someone to talk to and share your concerns with can be very helpful. This could be a trusted friend, family member or a trained person from a professional organisation.

If someone close to you is placing unwelcome restrictions on you, is emotionally mistreating you, or taking advantage of you financially, you may want to try to resolve things with them informally. Elder support services such as those provided by Relationships Australia could help to improve your situation.

You may be protective of the person mistreating or exploiting you, particularly if they are your adult children. It is important to remember that you have a right to feel comfortable and safe, and that people, including adult children, can get help for their problems. They may not be aware of the impact of their behaviour.

What should I do if I suspect elder abuse?

Elder abuse is distressing, and finding someone who understands the sensitive and confidential nature of the issue can help you in deciding what to do if you suspect an older person is being mistreated or exploited.

If someone is in immediate danger, call 000.

Remember that physical and sexual abuse are criminal acts. Other types of abuse are assessed on their particular circumstances.

Where it is appropriate, ask general questions about the person's wellbeing and their relationships.

Blame and judgement are never helpful. Listen to what the older person says and be understanding.

Understand that older people are often hesitant to cause trouble, as they may feel ashamed or worried about possible consequences.

Often, an older person feels protective of their adult children who may be mistreating or exploiting them. The adult child may have drug or alcohol dependency, mental health issues or difficult circumstances or challenges that are contributing to the abusive situation. An older person is more likely to accept help if they think their adult child's needs will be considered and addressed.

Keep a record of events. Taking note of signs and symptoms may help those who investigate, to effectively address the abuse.

It is generally not advisable to confront the abuser without careful thought.

Reassure the older person that there is help available.

If the older person is willing to get support, help them contact a relevant organisation. See [Where to get help](#) below.

If they are unwilling to get help, provide them with emotional support and offer contact details of support services should they want them later. Keep checking in on them where possible.

It's important that an older person feels in control of the help seeking process.

Where to get help

You can also contact the following state and territory information and assistance services.

State	Other providers	Phone number
ACT	Older Persons Abuse Prevention Referral Line	(02) 6205 3535
NSW	NSW Elder Abuse Helpline	1800 628 221
NT	Elder Abuse Information Line	1800 037 072
QLD	Elder Abuse Prevention Unit	1300 651 192
	Aged Rights Advocacy Service	08 8232 5377
SA	Elder Abuse phonenumber	1800 372 310
TAS	Tasmanian Elder Abuse Helpline	1800 441 169
VIC	Seniors Rights Victoria	1300 368 821
WA	Elder Abuse Helpline	1300 724 679

Lifeline provides support and referrals for those in crisis 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Call 131114 or visit www.lifeline.org.au