



Concerned about someone?

Information for family and friends concerned about someone who may be experiencing elder abuse.

This Help Sheet is for anyone who would like to know more about what they can do to help an older person who may be being mistreated or abused by a family member or other person in a trust relationship. It outlines what you can do and where you can go for further information.

Older people have rights

Older people have the right to live in safety, to be treated with dignity and respect and to make their own decisions. Some older people in our community are denied these rights, often by those who are closest to them.

What is 'elder abuse'?

Elder abuse is any mistreatment of an older person by another person with whom they have a relationship of trust. Often that person is a family member or carer but it could be a friend or neighbour whom they depend on. The abuse

Some warning signs of elder abuse

- The older person seems fearful, worried or withdrawn.
- They seem nervous or anxious with certain people.
- Family and or friends are denied access to the person.
- They no longer go out socially or get involved in activities.
- Unexplained injuries such as bruises, broken bones, sprains, cuts etc.
- Unpaid bills, unusual activity in bank accounts or credit cards.
- Changes to a Will, title or other documents.
- Disappearance of possessions.
- Poor hygiene or personal care.
- Absence of needed health items: hearing aids, dentures, medications etc.

Worried about your safety or independence?

Seniors Rights Victoria – Helpline 1300 368 821–10am–5pm, Monday–Friday.
Free support, legal advice, information and education.

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can be financial, psychological/emotional, physical or sexual. It can also involve deliberate social isolation or neglect of the older person. It is not uncommon for more than one type of abuse to be occurring. The different forms of elder abuse are all ways for another person to take over or control the life or property of an older person. Some forms of elder abuse are criminal acts, for example, acts involving theft, fraud, assault, or depriving someone of their liberty.

What can I do about someone who may be being abused?

- **Talk to the person you are concerned about.** Invite them to talk in a place where they are alone and safe.
- **Listen to the person.** Offer them your time and your support and respect their right to make their own decisions.
- **Believe** what the person is telling you.
- **Remind them they are not to blame** and that everyone has the right to live in safety and be treated with dignity and respect.
- **Let them know that help is available** and offer to assist them in getting the necessary support if and when they are ready to do so.
- **Encourage them to call Seniors Rights Victoria on 1300 368 821** for advice and assistance. If they are unable to call but you know they want to speak to us, you can call on their behalf and we will arrange a way to speak to them. We can talk with them by phone, at our offices or, if necessary, at home.
- **Continue to offer support and encouragement** even if the person is not ready to accept help at this point in time.

If there is an immediate risk of physical harm or damage to the older person's property call the police on 000.

The police can help in a number of ways, including removing the abuser and/or applying for an Intervention Order on the older person's behalf. This is a court document that will help protect the older person against further violence.

What if the older person doesn't want to take any action?

There are many reasons why an older person may not want to take action against an abusive person. They may have been in the situation for a long time and be reluctant to change. They may be afraid that the abuser will retaliate or punish them.

If they depend on the abuser for care or daily support, they may be afraid of losing this support or of being forced to move into a care facility. If the abuser is a partner or an adult child or grandchild they may not want to get that person into trouble, and they may want to preserve rather than lose the relationship. They may also feel ashamed of or responsible for that person's behaviour.

It is important to respect the older person's decisions, even if they choose to take no action at this time. Continue to offer support and encouragement.

Remember: Competent older people have the right to make their own decisions, and to be supported to do so rather than have other people take over and impose choices and decisions on them.

What can I do to help maintain the person's safety and wellbeing?

Help them work out a personal safety plan.

The plan should cover the things they can do to be safer at home, such as where they will go and who they will call if they need to leave the house quickly; how they will get there; and a list of the things they will need to take, such as medications

and other aids, bankbook/card, identity, Medicare, pension and legal documents. You can get more information about how to prepare a safety plan in the Information section at www.seniorsrights.org.au, or call Seniors Rights Victoria on 1300 368 821.

What if I can't access the person?

Request a regular welfare check from the local police. This is useful when you are not able to get access to the older person, such as when the abuser is stopping friends or other family members from having contact, or when you are not able to be close at hand. Provided you can satisfy the police that it is necessary, they will visit the house to see what the person's living situation is and to make sure they are OK.

Contact agencies that are providing services to the older person at home, such as local council or community health services and possibly also the neighbours. Let them know of your concerns and ask them to get in touch with you if the older person's situation worsens.

Contact the local Aged Care Assessment Service (ACAS) If you are concerned that the older person is neglected or their care needs are not being met, a worker can visit them and assess their situation and needs. Contact details for the ACAS in the older person's local area is available at www.health.vic.gov.au and search on 'ACAS contact list', or ask your local community health centre.

What if the older person is losing the capacity to make their own decisions?

Mild memory loss and slower thinking are a normal part of the ageing process. Most older people remain capable of managing their own finances and other affairs and can make their own decisions. Often, they simply need to allow more time to complete tasks or ask for help from time to time.

Some people with illnesses like dementia may eventually lose the capacity to manage their own affairs. In these cases an older person may need someone else to be appointed to make certain decisions for them. However, it's important to be aware that the claim that an older person 'has dementia' or has 'lost decision making capacity' is often used as an excuse or to hide bullying or abuse.

At Seniors Rights Victoria we test these claims about an older person's capacity by talking to the older person themselves. That's why, if you contact SRV on behalf of an older person, **we will still need to speak to them personally.**

If the person has lost capacity to the extent that we can't assist them, but we believe they need to be protected from abuse, we will make the necessary referrals to ensure they are protected.

If you are concerned about someone with impaired capacity contact the Office of the Public Advocate on 1300 309 337.

Look after yourself

Helping an older person who is experiencing abuse can be physically and emotionally demanding. It is important to look after yourself. Only give as much support as you feel you can reasonably offer and talk to someone if it becomes overwhelming. A good place to find out about getting support for yourself is your local community health service. You can also contact Carers Victoria on 1800 242 636.

Remember:

- Elder abuse can happen to any older person.
- Talk to the person and let them know they don't have to put up with it.
- Respect their wishes, even if they choose not to change the situation.
- Contact agencies for support if you can't access the person.
- Look after yourself.



Concerned about someone?

“When Uncle Zac let his alcoholic daughter Gina move into his home, I was very concerned.

I decided to visit more regularly, so that he knew I was there if he wanted to talk. At first Zac said Gina was good company and as his eyesight was failing he needed her to drive him to medical appointments and to the local shops.

Eventually Zac confided in me that Gina was not paying for her share of household expenses and that she charged Zac \$50 every time she drove him around. He could no longer afford a trip to the doctor. We rang Seniors Rights Victoria together. The staff spoke to Zac about applying for half-priced taxi fares, as well as his safety and care needs.

Gina is still living there, because that’s what Zac wanted, but now, he has his independence back. He is linked in with various community services and has a safety plan in case things go wrong. The best thing is that both Zac and Gina now know that if any further problems arise, help for Zac is just a phone call away.”

Where to get help or more information

Seniors Rights Victoria

1300 368 821 10am–5pm, Mon–Fri
www.seniorsrights.org.au

Free, confidential support, legal advice, information and education to help prevent elder abuse and safeguard the rights, dignity and independence of older people.

Seniors Information Victoria

1300 135 090
10am–5pm, Mon–Fri

Free information for older Victorians on a wide range of issues.

Seniors Online Victoria

www.seniorsonline.vic.gov.au

Victorian Government website with online information for seniors and links to a wide range of health, aged care and support services for older people.

Carers Victoria

1800 242 636

Free services and programs to help carers including information, counselling, workshops, referrals to other services and supports.

Seniors Rights Victoria is responsible for the content of this Help Sheet. This publication provides a general summary only of the subject matter covered and is for information only. It must not be relied upon as legal advice. People should seek professional advice about their specific case. Seniors Rights Victoria is not liable for any error or omission in this publication. Last updated March 2017 © Seniors Rights Victoria 2017



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