

We're here to help



Help Sheet

A case study

Vivienne was in her late 80s and had been living with her middle-aged son Steven for a number of years, following his divorce. Steven received a carer's pension but did not provide his mother with any real care or financial or domestic support.

Over time, Steven increased his use of drink and drugs, which led him to abuse Vivienne both verbally and psychologically. He took or misused her possessions and made her feel embarrassed to have visitors at the house. Vivienne's quality of life suffered and she became depressed and fearful.

Seniors Rights Victoria met with Vivienne and assessed her situation. It was clear that she wished to go on offering her son support in relation to his addictions, but felt she could no longer live with his abusive behaviour.

A lawyer from Seniors Rights Victoria wrote to Steven setting a deadline for him to leave the house, while advocates offered her support. Seniors Rights Victoria also identified a range of support services that Steven could access.

These actions had the desired effect. Steven got help for his addictions and modified his behavior in other ways. Vivienne and Steven continue to live together, and both their relationship and Vivienne's psychological wellbeing have improved.

Seniors Rights Victoria provides confidential support, legal advice, information and education to help prevent elder abuse and safeguard the rights, dignity and independence of older people. Seniors Rights Victoria can help you understand your options, refer you to specialist services and provide legal and other assistance where necessary.

Contact Seniors Rights Victoria
Helpline 1300 368 821, 10am–5pm, Mon–Fri
www.seniorsrights.org.au



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Adult children at home

Some adults return home to live with their parents. Some never leave ...

We may love our children. But that doesn't mean that we always love them living with us.

When adult children seek to return to their parents' home, the request may be sudden and unexpected. You may have little time to consider whether you really like the idea, or to discuss how living arrangements might work. Having an adult child (and possibly their children too) suddenly sharing your house is not always easy and their behaviour may make things worse. Things might go well in the short term, but over time, these situations can deteriorate, and some people even end up afraid of their adult children.

When children seek to return to their parents' home, they are often motivated by something going wrong in their own lives. Your child could be dealing with a range of problems which may affect their behaviour – and, over time, create problems for you:

- **Violence:** some adult children who return to their parents' home are fleeing violence, while others may have been the cause of it.
- **Depression, anxiety or other mental health issues:** mental health problems are increasingly common in today's society, and may be brought on by a relationship breakdown.
- **Alcohol or drug abuse:** again, a common cause or effect of relationship breakdowns
- **Gambling issues:** problematic gambling can cause financial stress and dramatic mood swings.
- **Unemployment or financial difficulties:** Australia is an expensive country for those on limited income.

No matter how old your children are, and whether or not they now have kids of their own, you will always be their parent. It is natural for you to want to do what you can to help them. But it is also important to look after your own needs.

If you allow your adult child to live with you, it is reasonable for you to expect to:

- feel safe and secure at all times
- receive help around the house
- enjoy a quiet and/or tidy home
- be able to maintain your own routine, and pursue your own interests
- receive reasonable contributions towards food, bills and/or rent
- maintain your own social activities, hobbies and friends
- not have to have constant stream of visitors, against your will
- be able to set a timeframe for how long your adult child can stay.

Worried about your safety or independence?

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

Your children's problems do not have to be your problems. It is your right to choose how you want to live in your home and who you live there with.

Adult children at home



What can you do?

Whether your adult children already live in your home, or you are just discussing the possibility of them doing so, it's always a good idea to set out some ground rules. Even if you don't want a formal, written agreement, it is wise to have a conversation about the different aspects of living together. Although conversations of this sort may be uncomfortable, many problems can be avoided when both parties' expectations are clear. It also gives you a common foundation from which to raise any issues you may have later.

Questions to guide your conversation

The following questions may help to guide your conversation and convey your expectations. Also refer to the Seniors Rights Victoria *Care for your Assets* booklet for help.

- How long will they stay with you?
- Will they pay money towards rent, food or bills?
- How much money will they pay? How often?
- Can they have friends visit or stay overnight?
- Will you be cooking and eating together?
- How are they expected to contribute to household chores?
- Are they allowed to drink, smoke or take drugs in your home?
- How much notice to leave will you give if things are not working out?

If your adult children won't leave when you want them to, seek legal advice from Seniors Rights Victoria or a community legal centre. A facilitated conversation, or even, mediation through a dispute settlement centre may also be helpful.

Setting boundaries

Boundaries are about understanding you are not responsible for other people's behaviour – even that of the people you love. You can love and

accept your children without loving and accepting all of the things that they do.

One of the simplest ways you can help set boundaries is to change the type of language you use. Try to make the shift from passive speech (where it seems like the choice is not your own) to empowered speech (where you make it clear you are making your own choice and taking responsibility for it).

For example, "I don't think I'll be able to do your laundry anymore" should become "I *won't* be doing your laundry for you anymore. I know that you are able to do it yourself".

Passive speech

I can't ...
I should ...
It's a problem ...
I hope ...
If only ...

Empowered speech

I won't ...
I could ...
It's an opportunity ...
I know ...
Next time ...



Remember

It is your life, your home and your rules! You can love and accept your children without loving and accepting all of the things that they do.

Elder abuse

Elder abuse is any act which causes harm to older people and is carried out by someone they know and trust. Often more than one type of elder abuse occurs at once, and some forms are criminal acts. The many different forms include:

- **Financial abuse:** Using someone's money, property or other assets illegally or improperly (for example, forcing someone to change a will or sign documents).
- **Emotional or psychological abuse:** Using threats, humiliation or harassment to cause anguish or feelings of shame or powerlessness. This often occurs in combination with other forms of abuse.
- **Physical abuse:** Inflicting pain or injury (for example, hitting, slapping, pushing or using restraints).
- **Sexual abuse:** Any sexual activity to which the older person has not consented.
- **Social abuse:** Preventing contact with relatives, friends or service providers, or restricting activities.
- **Neglect:** Failing to provide the basic necessities of life, either intentionally or unintentionally.

Staying safe

Your personal safety is more important than anything – all other problems can be dealt with later. If you are in danger or feel unsafe because of your adult child's abusive behaviour, call the police on 000. They can help in a number of ways, including by removing the abuser and/or applying for an intervention order on your behalf. You can also talk to the police about looking after your general safety.

Seniors Rights Victoria can also help you prepare for a possibly abusive situation. Our safety plans cover how to:

- plan an escape route out of the house and where you can go in an emergency
- plan where you will leave belongings and/or pets

- prepare an emergency bag of essential items
- have a code-word that signals to neighbours or friends you need help
- have a personal safety alarm and mobile phone with up-to-date telephone numbers
- ensure that your house is safe, with outside lights and working smoke detectors
- be prepared to change the locks to the property.

It may also be necessary to put some safety measures in place to protect your finances and valuables. Such measures may include:

- reviewing who has access to your bank accounts, and ensuring that you have your own private account (this may require changing your PINs if they have been disclosed, freezing a bank account or changing your account details)
- setting up direct debits or Centrepay so that bills are automatically deducted in affordable, regular amounts
- reviewing or setting up Powers of Attorney
- keeping jewelry, valuables, cheque books or credit cards locked up or hidden; and
- saving a bit of money for yourself, if possible.

In terms of psychological and emotional safety, there are several support services available to the family of people who are suffering from mental health, alcohol, drug, gambling or other issues. Such services will help you to stay safe and healthy and give you the skills that you need to deal with abusive situations. Contact Seniors Rights Victoria for guidance.

Remember

All people have the right to live in safety and have control over their own lives. No one deserves to be abused. If you are being abused, help is available now.