

# Safeguarding of Adults

## Factsheet

## Broad definition of a vulnerable adult

“A person who is 18 years of age or over, and who may be in need of community care services by reason of mental or other disability, age or illness and who is or may be unable to take care of themselves, or unable to protect themselves against significant harm or serious exploitation.”

## Abuse can occur when an individual is deprived of the right:

- To choose
- To privacy
- To independence
- To a decent quality of life
- To protection and safety

## Different forms of abuse include:

### Physical Abuse

- Injuries which are unexplained, intentional, or not prevented by another person
- Internal or external injuries (e.g. internal bleeding from body organs, fractures and dislocations) caused by assault (e.g. pushing, pinching, slapping, punching, burning, kicking, force-feeding and inappropriate restraint)
- Using incorrect moving and handling techniques
- Improper use of medication or alcohol, the denial of medication, or deliberate poisoning

### Sexual Abuse

- Sexual activities without consent or which causes distress
- Sexual activities which violate social taboos of family roles

### Illegal Sexual Activities

- Non-contact abuse - looking, photography, indecent exposure, sexual teasing or innuendo, sexual harassment
- Contact abuse - touching, masturbation, penetration or attempted penetration

## Recognising Physical Abuse

Abuse in elderly people may be difficult to identify because the normal ageing process can make them more susceptible to bruising and fractures, etc.

You should take into consideration whether the injury is rarely caused non-accidentally and whether or not the explanation is consistent with the type of injury.

**Some indications of physical abuse are:**

**Bruises** - on protected parts of the body (i.e. breasts, buttocks, lower body, abdomen and inner thighs).

**Other marks** - including black eyes, red marks, slap marks, grip marks, pinch marks, and marks made by an implement.

**Physical injuries** - injuries not consistent with the explanation given, including burns, scalds, bite marks and fractures.

## Recognising Sexual Abuse

There may be injuries to the genital/rectal area. In particular, soreness, unexplained bleeding of the anal or genital area, bruising on the thighs, genital area or buttocks.

## Recognising Emotional or Psychological Abuse

Mental anguish, fear, stress and strain could be signs of this type of abuse.

The individual may act differently in the presence of a particular person, and there may be signs of mental distress or upset (e.g. cries for help, crying, etc).

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## Factsheet

### Emotional or Psychological Abuse

- Mental anguish caused by threatening or aggressive language/behaviour, harassment, humiliation or neglect
- Verbal abuse - including threats, bullying, racism, sexism, intimidation or being shouted at
- Deprivation of the individual's normal contact
- Involuntary withdrawal from a valued activity
- Failure to respond adequately to emotional needs, such as security and affection
- Failure to protect from emotional or psychological abuse by others
- Forcing a person to perform tasks which are inappropriate or inhumane

### Physical Neglect

- Neglect to the extent that an individual's health, development or general well-being is affected
- Denial of an individual's access to appropriate care professionals (i.e. Social Services or medical staff)
- Denial of food, shelter, warmth and sleep

### Self Neglect

- Failure of an individual to care for him/her self with the result that there is a likely or actual serious impairment to him/her self
- While a person's rights should be respected, they may infringe on the rights and responsibilities of others (e.g. carers)

### Institutional Abuse

This could occur in an individual's own home, a residential or nursing home, a hospital or day centre, and might include:

- Excessively rigid routines
- Lack of personal possessions
- Lack of choice in everyday activities
- Change in accommodation without consent
- Infantilisation of an individual (treating the individual as you might a young child)

### Financial Abuse

- Material exploitation - misuse of a person's money, possessions, property, insurance or related documents, or preventing access to such material goods
- Theft - stealing a person's money, possessions, property and/or insurance or related documents
- Extortion of the above items through threats

### Recognising Emotional or Psychological Abuse contd...

The individual may also become quiet and over compliant in the presence of a particular person, or alternatively the individual may get aggressive, destructive or paranoid in the presence of that person.

**Physical symptoms could be increased incontinence, or eating and sleeping disorders without medical reason.**

**Ritualistic behaviour may also increase.**

### Recognising Physical Neglect

This could be a lack of personal health and hygiene and low living standards.

The individual may be cold, dirty, soiled, smelly, hungry and underweight, and may be living a solitary existence.

**There may be a denial of personal care when requested or needed, and soreness or chafing due to poor hygiene.**

### Recognising Self Neglect

**All the signs and symptoms of physical neglect could be present, but it is the individual him/herself who is refusing an appropriate level of care, and denying him/herself a decent standard of health and hygiene.**

### Recognising Institutional Abuse

Symptoms of this could be an excessive requirement for routine, a lack of personal possessions, a lack of choice in everyday activities, a change of accommodation without consent and the individual feeling infantilised.

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## Factsheet

### Discrimination Abuse

- Lack of respect shown to an individual
- Failure to respect dietary needs
- Failure to respect cultural and religious needs
- Signs of a substandard service offered to an individual
- Exclusion from rights and services afforded to citizens e.g. health, education, employment, criminal justice and civic status
- Lack of insight or understanding of person's needs or behaviour
- Cold, dismissive or intolerant attitude by carer or other significant person

### Observation

Careful observation of clients and effective communication with them can go a long way towards preventing abuse, especially while supporting them with bathing or dressing, when you can look for unexplained injuries, marks or bruises. A client can be observed for changes in behaviour in the presence of a particular person/s, and any money or valuables in a care setting can be listed and properly recorded. Suspected cases of abuse can be reported to the senior care, nurse-in-charge, care manager, matron, etc, and an official or unofficial investigation can follow if necessary.

### References

- The Care Act. DoH (2014)
- Sexual Offences Act (2003).
- Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act (2006).
- Nolan, Y. (2005) – Health & Social Care (Adults). Heinemann. Oxford.
- Richards, J. (2003) – The Complete A – Z Health & Social Care Handbook. 2nd Ed. Hodder and Stoughton. London.
- [www.doh.gov.uk](http://www.doh.gov.uk) (Department of Health)
- [www.csci.org.uk](http://www.csci.org.uk) (Commission for Social Care Inspection)
- [www.directgov.uk](http://www.directgov.uk) (Directgov – government information)

### Recognising Financial Abuse

- A depletion of the individual's finances and misuse of their money or property by somebody
- Their money being spent when they are unable to go out and spend it
- Unexplained withdrawals from their savings account, often in round figures and clustered at certain times
- A disappearance of their valuables from their home or room

### Recognising Discrimination Abuse

- Has communication difficulties
- Rejects help
- Has unusual or offensive behaviours
- Has abusive or aggressive behaviours
- Does not consider the needs of the carer and other family members
- Is socially isolated i.e. does not have other friends or visitors
- Is dependent on the carer for financial purposes
- Is highly dependent on the carer for physical and/or psychological care