

# What is Elder Abuse?

## Factsheet



### Language support

Help, support and advice about elder abuse is available on [www.compass.info](http://www.compass.info) in many languages.

An older person has the right to respect, dignity, independence, care and self-fulfilment. Unfortunately, older people can be mistreated, hurt or abused in many forms:

- You can be abused financially, emotionally, psychologically, physically, sexually, or neglected. The abuse can often be a combination of these different types of abuse
- It can be intentional or unintentional
- You can be mistreated, hurt or abused once, or several times
- It can be carried out by someone you know, such as a family member, friend, professional, or paid caregiver

***“A single, or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust that causes harm or distress to an older person.”***

**– The World Health Organisation**

### The types of abuse an older person may experience

When we know what to look for, the better we are at identifying elder abuse. These are the five commonly recognised types of abuse older people experience.



### Financial abuse

This is the theft or misuse of an older person's money, assets or property.

**Some warning signs that you or another older person is being abused:**

- An unexplained disappearance of belongings
- An unexplained inability to pay bills
- Significant bank withdrawals
- Changes to wills
- Access to bank accounts or statements is blocked
- An accumulation of unpaid bills
- An empty fridge
- A disparity between living conditions and money
- No money to pay for home essentials like food, clothing, and utilities



## Emotional or psychological abuse

Any act that causes emotional pain, anguish, or distress or is demeaning to an individual.

**Some warning signs that you or another older person is being abused:**

- Any one of the following: resignation, shame, depression, tearfulness, confusion, agitation
- Feelings of helplessness
- Unexplained paranoia or excessive fear
- A change in appetite or sleep patterns, such as insomnia
- Unusual passivity or anger
- Sadness or grief at the loss of interactions with others
- Withdrawal or listlessness due to a lack of visitors
- A change to levels of self-esteem
- Worry or anxiety after a visit by a specific person/people
- Social isolation



## Physical abuse

An act that causes physical pain, injury or a combination of both. Physical abuse may appear as a change in appearance, attitude or behaviour.

**Some warning signs that you or another older person is being abused:**

- Internal or external injuries, including sprains, dislocations and fractures, pressure sores, unexplained bruises or marks on different areas of the body, pain on touching
- Broken or healing bones
- Lacerations to the mouth, lips, gums, eyes or ears
- Missing teeth and/or eye injuries
- Evidence of hitting, punching, shaking, pulling, such as bruises, lacerations, choke marks, hair loss or welts
- Burns, i.e. rope, cigarettes, matches, iron, and/or hot water



## Sexual Abuse

Any behaviour of a sexual nature, done to an older person without their consent. This includes physical interactions and non-contact acts of a sexual nature.

**Some warning signs that you or another older person is being abused:**

- Unexplained STD or incontinence (bladder or bowel)
- Injury and trauma, e.g. scratches, bruises etc. to face, neck, chest, abdomen, thighs or buttocks
- Trauma including bleeding around the genitals, chest, rectum or mouth
- Torn or bloody underclothing or bedding
- Human bite marks
- Anxiety around the perpetrator and other psychological symptoms



## Neglect

The failure to meet an older person's basic needs, such as food, shelter, clothing, warmth or essential medical care.

**Some warning signs that you or another older person is being abused:**

- Inadequate clothing
- Complaints of being too cold or too hot
- Poor personal hygiene and/or an unkempt appearance
- Lack of medical or dental care
- Injuries that have not been properly cared for
- Absence of required aids
- Exposure to unsafe, unhealthy, and/or unsanitary conditions
- Unexplained weight loss, dehydration, poor skin integrity, malnutrition

**compass**  
GUIDING ACTION ON ELDER ABUSE

**Help starts here**

If you or someone you know needs help tackling elder abuse, visit [www.compass.info](http://www.compass.info) or call **1800 ELDERHelp** (1800 353 374)

