

# Combating Elder Abuse & Building Resilience

## Session 1 - Defining Elder Abuse



### What is Elder Abuse?

A single or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within a relationship where there is an expectation of trust, which causes harm or distress to an older person.”  
(World Health Organization, 2002).

Any action and/or inaction that jeopardizes the health and well-being of a senior.

### Signs of Elder Abuse

- Changes in behaviour: fear, anxiety, depression
- Changes in day-to-day routines
- Unexplained physical injuries (bruises, scratches, sprains)
- Dehydration, poor nutrition
- Improper use of medication
- Poor hygiene, rashes, bed sores, abrasions
- A sudden change in cash flow or financial holdings

### Seniors Who Are Abused...

- Are often independent
- Are typically mentally competent
- May be dependent on the abuser in some way
- May be isolated from family, friends and neighbours
- May have cognitive issues, addiction, personal or financial problems

### Forms of Elder Abuse

1. **Physical Abuse** – any action that causes physical discomfort, pain or injury: pushing, shaking, hitting, rough-handling, deliberate over/under-medication or improper use of restraints.
2. **Emotional Abuse** – action or words causing feelings of distress, fear, a sense of worthlessness, or a loss of dignity: bullying, threatening, name-calling, humiliation, or treating the older person like a child.
3. **Financial Abuse** – theft or misuse of money, power of attorney, property or possessions: withholding money, forcing the sale of property or possessions, theft, coercing changes in wills.
4. **Neglect** – intentional or unintentional absence of care or assistance: failing to provide adequate nutrition or medical attention; leaving an elderly person in an unsafe or isolated situation.
5. **Sexual Abuse** – any sexual behavior directed towards an older adult without their full knowledge or consent.
6. **Spiritual Abuse** – preventing a person from practicing their faith or forcing the senior to participate in a spiritual ritual, practice, or religion.
7. **Institutional Abuse** – any physical, sexual, psychological, financial abuse or neglect occurring within a facility including “poor standard of care, lack of response to complex needs, rigid routines, inadequate staffing and insufficient knowledge base within the service.”

## Traits Often Exhibited By Abusers

- Threaten, insult or blame the older person
- Express indifference or anger toward the senior
- Overly concerned with the senior's finances
- Socially isolate the senior and speak on their behalf
- Misuse alcohol and/or drugs

(M. Hofer, University of Illinois)

## Who are the Offenders?

Most elder abuse is carried out by adult children, but other family members and spouses/partners may also be responsible.

## Other Warning Signs

- The older person doesn't have the freedom to go where and when they want.
- The senior has to account for every dollar they spend and/or every place that they go.
- The elder is separated from loving relationships that used to be important to them.

(Ariel Zwang, CEO Safe Horizons)

## Who Can Help?

### Senior Safety Line and Chatline

1-866-299-1011 or [awhl.org/online-chat](http://awhl.org/online-chat)

TTY 1-866-299-0008 (telecom device for the deaf)

**PSAN – Prevention of Senior Abuse Network - [psan-sc.ca](http://psan-sc.ca)**

**EAPO – Elder Abuse Prevention Ontario - [www.eapon.ca](http://www.eapon.ca)**

**OPP – 1-888-310-1122**

### References (2021)

<https://psan-sc.ca> (Prevention of Senior Abuse Network – Simcoe County)

<http://www.eapon.ca> (Elder Abuse Prevention – Ontario)

<https://www.justice.gc.ca>

<http://www.elderabuseontario.com>

<http://www.neighboursfriendsandfamilies.ca>

[www.seniors.gc.ca](http://www.seniors.gc.ca)

<https://www.seniorlink.com/blog/stateofcaregiving>

Elder Abuse: The Hidden Crime, Advocacy Centre for the Elderly and Community Legal Education Ontario,

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-with-a-looming-aging-crisis-who-is-helping-the-caregivers/>

It's Not Right - "How You Can Identify Abuse and Help Older Adults at Risk". Government of Canada

Seniors Safety Line 1-800-622-6232

211ontario.ca or dial "211"

[www.opp.ca](http://www.opp.ca) or call 1-888-310-1122

<https://www.askennonia.com>, (705) 526-7609