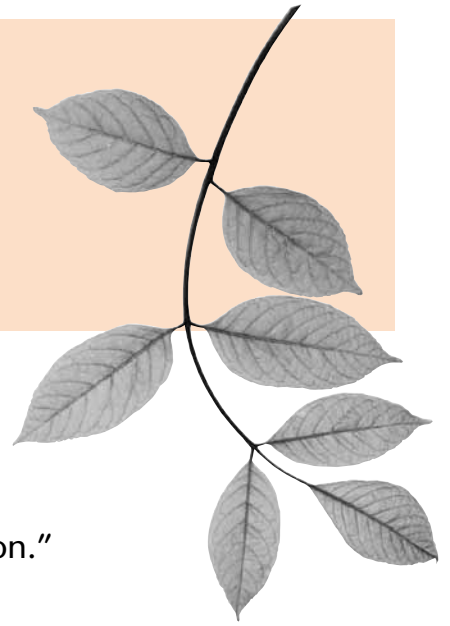


FAQs and myths: abuse and neglect



What is older adult abuse?

The World Health Organization (2002) defines abuse of older persons as, “single or repeated acts, 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.”

Myth: *No one would ever abuse an older person.*

Reality: The abuse of older persons exists in every community. It is estimated that four to ten percent of people in Canada experience some form of abuse or neglect in later life.

Who is abused?

It can be any older person. Abuse can happen regardless of gender, activity level, physical or mental ability, health, income, culture or level of education. Abuse can happen to an older person who lives alone, with family, or in a care facility.

Myth: *Abusers are usually strangers.*

Reality: It can be anyone — but often it is someone known to the older person such as a family member (adult child, spouse, grandchild), friend, neighbour, care provider or landlord. An abuser might be someone the older person depends on to provide care. Abusers are rarely strangers and are often a person in a position of trust.

There are different types of abuse, including physical, emotional, financial, sexual, neglect and self-neglect.

What is the most common form of abuse of older persons?

Financial abuse is the most common reported form of abuse involving an older person. Financial abuse includes fraud and improper use of an Enduring Power of Attorney. Neglect is the second most common form of abuse.

Myth: *The stress of care-giving causes abuse of older persons.*

Reality: Stress does not cause abuse. Everyone experiences stress from time to time, but most caregivers do not resort to abuse at times of stress. Stress is an excuse often used by abusers in an attempt to justify their behaviour and avoid consequences.

What help is available? Who can older persons call if they need protection from abuse?

In situations when abuse is against the law (such as physical or sexual abuse or threats of the same), the RCMP can help. For all types of abuse, the Seniors' Services/Adult Protection Unit offers support to older adults who may be in need of protection or who want to explore their options regarding their personal safety and well-being.

***Myth:** As people age, they lose the ability to make good decisions.*

Reality: Most older persons are fully capable of making wise decisions and competently managing all areas of their life. Aging does not mean diminishing mental capacity. In fact, life experience leads to greater wisdom.

How can older persons protect themselves from abuse and neglect?

One of the best ways for older persons to protect themselves from abuse is to stay connected with family, friends and community. Isolation is the single biggest risk factor in abusive situations.



Everyone deserves to be treated with respect and dignity

You are not alone — help and support are available

Seniors' Services/Adult Protection Unit: phone 456-3946; toll-free 1-800-661-0408, ext. 3946