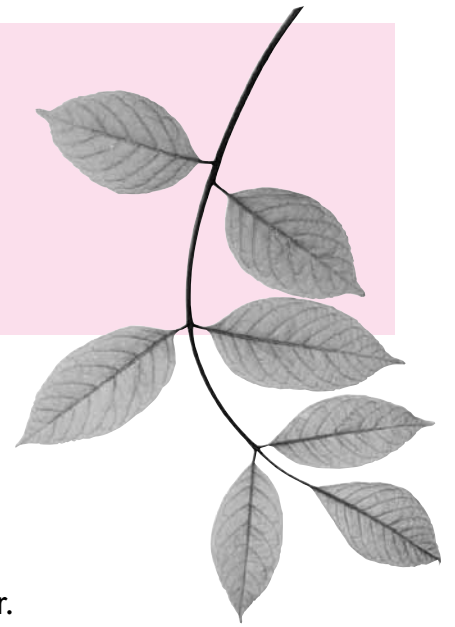


Abuse of older persons: profile of an abuser



Who are abusers of older persons?

- **Family members** — anyone can be an abuser, but it is usually someone close to the older person, such as a son, daughter, spouse, grandchild, or other relative; and
- **Other abusers** — an abuser might also be a neighbour, friend, health care or social service provider, paid caregiver, or volunteer.

What are some characteristics of an abuser?

- **Imbalance of power** — the abuser is usually someone in a position of trust and/or authority.
- **Dependency** — the abuser is often dependent on the older person for money or a place to live.
- **History of abuse** — the abuser may have a history of abusive behaviour in past relationships, or may have been abused or witnessed family violence as a child.
- **Personal or emotional problems** — the abuser may have other issues such as drug or alcohol abuse, gambling or financial problems, mental health issues, or chronic unemployment.
- **Low self-esteem and isolation** — often the abuser has very low self-esteem and limited social supports.
- **False sense of entitlement** — abusers may believe their actions are justified. They might also feel entitled to an older person's property or possessions because they believe they are owed for helping or caring for him or her.
- **Stress** — the abuser may have other stresses in their life such as financial or relationship problems.
- **Lack of skills** — the abuser may be unprepared for the responsibility of caregiving, lacking either skills or suitability.

BARRIERS TO DISCLOSURE OF ABUSE

There are several reasons that an older person might not disclose abuse.

Fear

- retaliation (fear that the abuse will get worse);
- being abandoned or put into a nursing home;
- not being believed or not having proof of the abuse;
- losing a caregiver; and
- being shunned by the rest of the family or being denied access to other family, especially grandchildren.

Belief

- the abuse is somehow “deserved” or justified;
- the abuse is a “family problem”; and
- no one can help.

Other reasons...

- **Dependence** — on the abuser (emotional, physical or financial);
- **Pressure** — to maintain the family or community reputation;
- **Literacy, language or cultural barriers** might make it difficult to communicate with supports or limit access to information;
- **Hopelessness** about things being different, and depression;
- **Shame** and embarrassment;
- **Protecting** the abuser from possible consequences (such as criminal charges);
- **Hope** — that things will change;
- **Acceptance** — of abuse as normal; and
- **Love** for the abuser.



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