

Abuse of older persons in later life

Abuse of older persons is a complex problem with no simple explanation. Every situation is different.

There are several reasons abuse why may occur in later life:

- **Power and control** — An abuser exerts power over an older person to gain control in the relationship.
- **Dependency** — Often an older person is dependent on the abusive person in some way, such as financial dependence (dependency is not necessarily due to diminished physical or cognitive abilities).
- **Cycle of family violence** — An adult child who was abused by his or her now-aging parent may use abuse as a way of “getting even” for childhood abuse or perceived past wrongs.
- **Ageism** — Negative attitudes, discrimination, and stereotypes about older persons may increase the risk of abuse.
- **Lack of understanding** of the aging process may lead to unreasonable expectations being placed on an older person. This may lead to an older person or a caregiver expressing frustration, which may further increase the risk of abuse.
- **Lack of skills** to properly care for an older person, especially if the older person has a disability or diminished cognitive ability.
- **False sense of entitlement** — An abuser may feel somehow entitled to an older person’s property because of a perceived position in the family, or because he or she feels owed for helping or caring for the older person.
- **Stress** — Abuse is more likely to happen at times of increased stress, especially when families are not prepared for the emotional and financial demands of caring for an older person.

Social connection decreases the risk of abuse: stay in touch with family and friends.

Stress alone does not cause abuse. Most caregivers do not resort to abusive behaviour at times of stress.

An abuser’s personal issues may also contribute to abuse:

- addiction issues (alcohol, drugs or gambling);
- history of violence or criminal behaviour;
- mental health problems;
- poor coping skills; and
- financial pressures and greed.

There is no excuse for abuse.



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