

Responding to abuse of older persons

All community members play an important role in ensuring that older persons are valued, supported and safe. Abuse is a difficult issue to address. As every older person's life history is unique, so too is each response. You can have a positive impact by being honest and sincere and taking time to hear his or her story.

Ways to help:

- **Recognize the signs** of abuse and neglect. Signs may vary depending on the type of abuse and circumstance. Some common signs of abuse include depression, fear, anxiety, withdrawal from usual activities, unexplained injuries, lack of basic necessities, change in hygiene, inability to pay bills, etc.
- **Believe** the older person when he or she confides in you about the situation.
- **Safety first!** The immediate safety of you and the older person is a priority. If you think that an older person may be in immediate danger **call 911 or the RCMP**. Be conscious of not increasing the risk to the older person or others (e.g., confronting or alerting the alleged abuser).
- **Ask if you can help.** Remain calm and speak gently to the adult. Ask questions such as *Do you feel safe? How can I help? What do you need? What is your biggest fear?*
- **Convey other comforting messages:** *It's not your fault. I care about you. You are not alone. Help is available.*
- **Listen** to the older person, do not jump to conclusions and encourage him or her to seek professional support.
- **Respect** the older person's wishes, privacy, decisions, and important relationships.
- **Educate** yourself about abuse issues and listen to your intuition. Familiarize yourself with and seek support from community resources.

If you are concerned about a vulnerable older person being abused or neglected or who is self-neglecting, please contact Adult Protection. Please phone 456-3946 (or toll-free 1-800-661-0408, ext. 3946).

Tips for helping:

- Always take disclosure of abuse seriously.
- Document details of the disclosure and the actions you have taken.
- Staff/volunteers should always advise their supervisor about abusive situations in a timely manner.
- The most effective response is achieved when all supports work collaboratively.
- Be aware that an older person may experience extreme guilt or remorse and the stress could trigger a medical crisis or delirium.
- When you observe compromised or fluctuating capacity, seek further assessment from a health professional.
- After a disclosure of abuse, the risk to the older person may increase, and therefore thorough safety planning is required (see fact sheet #16: Safety planning to assist abused older persons).
- Strive to provide support in the least intrusive and most effective manner.

Tips to prevent abuse:

- Encourage and support older persons to remain active and socially connected (e.g., support group, cultural or faith-based supports, other meaningful social activities), as this can be a great source of strength and confidence.
- Assist the older person to identify trustworthy friends or family who he or she can rely on when he or she feels vulnerable. **Remember: the biggest risk factor is isolation.**
- Encourage older persons to plan ahead and formalize and document their values and wishes by completing an Enduring Power of Attorney, Will, and Advance Directive.
- Help reduce the older person's dependency on the abuser; for example, by arranging home care services.
- Caregivers may become overwhelmed and fatigued. Encourage caregivers to plan breaks for themselves and respite for the older adult.

In Yukon there is no legal obligation to report abuse of vulnerable older persons. However, Adult Protection is mandated to respond to reports of abuse. Adult Protection is staffed by trained social workers who specialize in supporting abused, neglected and self-neglecting older adults and their families. The reporter's identity is always kept confidential.



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