



# Help is Available

## **Abuse can happen to people of any age... and help is available**

No one deserves to be mistreated or exploited, at any age. Abuse and neglect of older adults happens. It causes harm, and in the worst situation, may cause death. Each of us can work together to help prevent it.

### **If you are being abused, you should know:**

- You do not deserve to be abused.
- You have a right to live without fear.
- You are not to blame for the violence or the threats.
- You have the right to a safe, healthy environment and healthy relationships.
- Abuse often gets worse over time.
- You have the right to control your own life and make your own decisions.
- You are not alone. Many people are abused and many people have found ways to deal with these situations.

You may or may not want to leave the situation, or take action, but it is important to know your options, and that there is help available. Making difficult choices is often easier with good information. Good information gives you personal choice and personal power. If you are not ready, or do not want to do anything right now, that is your choice – it is okay.

### **If you are being abused, help is available:**

- No matter how long it's been going on, or how scared you may be, tell someone you trust what is happening to you.
- If someone is hurting or threatening you, or if it is not safe for you where you are, call the police.



- Talk with people to learn more about useful resources in your community. Find out your options to take care of your personal needs and financial security.
- Make a safety plan in case you have to leave quickly:
  - Set aside an extra set of keys, money, I.D., glasses, bank card, address book, medication, and important papers. Keep this outside of your home or in a safe place.
  - Find a safe place to go in the event of an emergency.
  - Consider obtaining a restraining order to protect you.

## **Tips for Older Adults to Consider**

- If possible, take some time following the death of a spouse or a divorce before making major changes in your life.
- Carefully consider any requests for money or property, to sign loans or sign off your rights to your home or land, even from relatives or friends. Resist making decisions under pressure and get a second opinion from a trusted friend, family member or professional.
- Consider having automatic bank deposits and bank payments, particularly if you need assistance with banking.
- Be careful about sharing your personal banking information (i.e. account numbers, passwords) with other people. Once you have given someone your personal identification number they have access to your bank account and opportunity to use your money.
- If you lend or give someone money, write down the amount, the person's name, the date, and whether it is a loan or a gift; ask them to sign the written document. This will help you remember and keep a record.
- For any major decision involving your property, consider using a notary, lawyer, or community advocate to help you consider options and consequences before deciding.



## If you know someone who is being abused, you can help:

If you discover a crime or dangerous situation is occurring to an older adult, call 911, your local or provincial police, RCMP or tribal police immediately. If you are not sure if an older person is being abused or neglected, you may want to talk to a health professional or community agency.

- **Believe the abused older person.** Do this even if the abuser seems nice, or if the abuser is your friend. Do not deny or underestimate what is going on. Abuse is never acceptable and should never be ignored.
- **Listen without judging.** Let the abused person know that you care and have respect for their decision-making. Listen to them first and talk to them about out how you might assist.
- **Educate yourself.** Realize that abuse and neglect exist in your own community. Learn about local resources.
- **Understand** that leaving an abusive relationship is difficult. Leaving is often a gradual process. It can involve many steps and occurs over time. Be respectful of the abused person's decisions.
- **Encourage the person** to seek support and assistance.
- **Do not confront the suspected abuser.** This could put you or the person who is being abused in danger.
- If you think an older adult needs help, talk to them first to find out how you might assist. Ask things like: How are you doing? Are you having trouble at home? Can I help you? Is there someone I can put you in touch with who can help you?



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## **How else can I help as a Family Member?**

- Encourage family discussions with the older adult about his or her current situation and plans for future needs. What does the older adult want? What can they do on their own or with some support?
- Keep regular contact among family members to help everyone become aware of changes in a parent, spouse, or partner's health.
- Learn caregiving strategies and share responsibilities among family members.

## **How else can I help as a Service Provider?**

- Help older adults and families learn more about their rights and responsibilities.
- Help older adults build or regain confidence and skills.
- Help to reduce the person's social isolation.

## **Governments Help Too**

In many parts of Canada, local, provincial, territorial and federal governments are working to help prevent and address abuse and neglect of older adults in many ways, including:

- Taking leadership in developing and supporting prevention strategies and programs;
- Developing and supporting public awareness activities;
- Supporting community-based programs and resources for older adults who are experiencing or at risk of abuse or neglect; and
- Improving training of professionals and access to health and justice services.

Adapted from Canadian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, "If you are being abused"; Nova Scotia Seniors' Secretariat, "Fact sheet on elder abuse"; and Ontario Seniors' Secretariat information sheet, "What you need to know about abuse."