



# What is elder abuse?

Elder abuse is a form of family violence and it is unacceptable.

Elder abuse is any act occurring within a relationship where there is an expectation of trust, which results in harm to an older person. Elder abuse may be physical, sexual, financial, psychological, social and/or neglect.

Elder abuse that occurs in aged care facilities and nursing homes has received a lot of media coverage, particularly in the wake of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, with a final report expected by 30 April 2020. This form of abuse violates human rights and is both illegal and abhorrent.

This factsheet refers to violence and elder abuse that occurs in a family context that is perpetrated by either a relative, friend or known and trusted associate (such as a carer).

Research shows that up to 14 per cent of older people may be experiencing elder abuse. Yet the real number is estimated to be much higher than this because elder abuse is often underreported.

## Forms of elder abuse

Family violence against older people can take many forms. It is not uncommon for older people to experience multiple forms of elder abuse at one time.

Some common forms of elder abuse are listed below.

### Financial abuse

One of the most common forms of elder abuse reported by older Victorians. Examples may include:

- › Coercing an older person into giving money to a relative
- › Taking money to compensate for looking after an older family member
- › Pressuring an older relative into making financial decisions
- › Forcing an older relative to change their Will.

### Emotional (or psychological) abuse

Using threats, humiliation or harassment, which may cause distress, feelings of shame, stress or powerlessness. Emotional abuse is often used alongside other forms of elder abuse.

## Neglect

Failing to provide the necessities of life.

Examples may include:

- › Failure to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, medical attention or dental care
- › Using medication improperly
- › Keeping older people in a state of poor hygiene.

## Physical abuse

Inflicting pain or injury through physical force.

Examples may include:

- › Hitting
- › Slapping
- › Pushing
- › Using restraints.

## Social abuse

Forced isolation and increased helplessness.

Examples may include:

- › Restricting access to support networks (family, friends, help services)
- › Discouraging visitors/social outings
- › Opening mail/screening phone calls without permission.

## Sexual abuse

Any form of forced or unwanted sexual activity, including taking advantage of a person unable to give consent.

## Barriers to reporting

The reasons for not reporting elder abuse are complicated and may include:

- › fear, including fear of retaliation or family breakdown
- › older people may not recognise that what they are experiencing is elder abuse
- › older people may feel that they are responsible for the behaviour of the perpetrator
- › feelings of guilt and shame
- › belief that aggression and violence is a normal part of family life
- › fear that seeking help will lead to being placed in residential care
- › lack of knowledge about available sources of help.

## What to do if you suspect elder abuse is occurring or you are experiencing elder abuse

If you are unsure about asking for help, remember everyone has the right to be safe. No older person should be subjected to any form of abuse, mistreatment or neglect. Elder abuse is a form of family violence, and it is unacceptable.

If you or someone you know is experiencing any form of elder abuse, you can discuss your concern with a trusted family member, GP or physician.

For further information and for independent advice, contact:

### Seniors Rights Victoria – 1300 368 821

Available from 10.00am to 5.00pm Monday to Friday.  
For more information on Seniors Rights Victoria, visit [www.seniorsrights.org.au](http://www.seniorsrights.org.au)

### 1800 RESPECT – 1800 737 732

Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.  
For more information on 1800 RESPECT, visit [www.1800respect.org.au](http://www.1800respect.org.au)

### Men's Referral Service – 1300 766 491

Available from 8.00am to 9.00pm Monday to Friday, and from 9.00am to 5.00pm Saturday to Sunday.  
For more information on Men's Referral Service, visit [www.ntv.org.au](http://www.ntv.org.au)

**If you are concerned for your immediate safety or that of someone else, please contact the police in your state or territory or call Triple Zero (000) for emergency services.**

For more information, please visit [www.respectvictoria.vic.gov.au](http://www.respectvictoria.vic.gov.au)

