

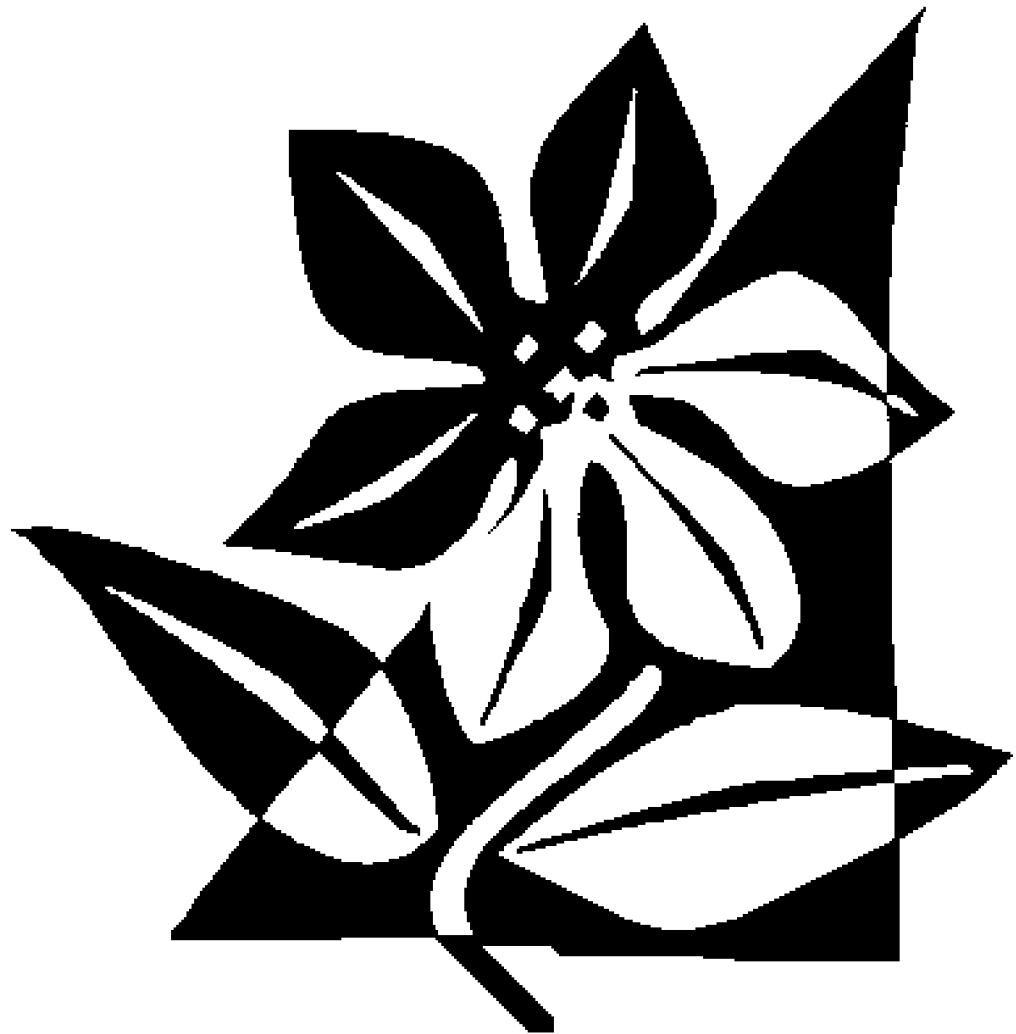
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**AWARENESS INFORMATION FOR PEOPLE IN THE WORKPLACE**

# **Abuse & Neglect of Older Adults**



Canada

# **ABUSE & NEGLECT OF OLDER ADULTS:**

## **AWARENESS INFORMATION FOR PEOPLE IN THE WORKPLACE**

A guide for use by people interested in meeting together to discuss family violence issues.

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SENSIBILISATION DU PERSONNEL EN MILIEU DE TRAVAIL**

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# INTRODUCING THE ABUSE AND NEGLECT OF OLDER ADULTS AWARENESS INFORMATION HANDBOOK...

**THIS HANDBOOK WAS DEVELOPED IN THE BELIEF THAT:** \_\_\_\_\_

- people get together to discuss issues that concern them;
- people learn by discussion with each other;
- learning can be facilitated within a peer leadership approach;
- a peer leadership approach demonstrates respect for people's experiences and life situations;
- people bring with them valuable skills and valid points of view that guide their interactions with others; and
- a peer leadership approach is appropriate in the presentation and discussion of basic material about issues that affect us all in our everyday lives.

**FEATURES:** \_\_\_\_\_

## *DESIGNED FOR INFORMAL GROUPS*

This information was developed as part of a series of guides for use by people interested in meeting to discuss family violence issues.

## *BASED ON PEER LEADERSHIP*

The material is organized in a simple, non-technical format to help the presenter, who is neither a content expert nor necessarily an experienced teacher or public speaker.

## *CONTAINS BASIC INFORMATION ON FAMILY VIOLENCE*

The material is introductory and designed to be appropriate and of interest to the general public.

## *FOCUSES ON AWARENESS AND RESOURCES*

The goal of the information session is to help people develop a greater awareness about family violence, practical steps for help and the range of resources available in their own community, including services, programs and resource people who have specialized and

expert information on this topic.

## *DESIGNED IN A ONE HOUR FORMAT*

The session takes about one hour, though groups may decide to take more or less time, or to carry over discussion to subsequent sessions.

## *FOR USE IN THE WORKPLACE AND OTHER SETTINGS*

While the handbook is designed for use in the workplace, over a lunch hour, or before or after work, it may also be used in other settings in the community to guide informal discussions on family violence.

## *PART OF A SERIES*

Additional handbooks on family violence and child abuse, are available free from the National Clearinghouse on Family Violence.

# HOW THE INFORMATION IS ORGANIZED

## PLANNING THE INFORMATION SESSION

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Goals, who might be involved, where and when sessions might take place, and how to set up a session are included in the first section. Note the page called TIPS FOR PRESENTERS, with suggestions and ideas on presenting the information in the handbook.

This section also contains background information from the National Clearinghouse on Family Violence, a blank ABUSE AND NEGLECT OF OLDER ADULTS COMMUNITY RESOURCE LIST to be completed by the presenter and a sample POSTER for advertising the session.

## STEP BY STEP GUIDE

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This is the guide to the presentation. It includes basic information, ideas for introductions, suggestions for what to say on

the topic, an agenda, quiz answers, activity ideas, handouts and guidelines on how to use the handouts.

# PLANNING THE INFORMATION SESSION

## GOALS

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It is important to know what you hope to accomplish by holding an information session on abuse and neglect of older adults. The goals of the information session are to help people:

- become aware there is violence and abuse in their community;
- talk about and begin to understand abuse and neglect of older adults;

- be aware of practical steps for help; and
- be aware of resources available in the community.

People in our society are concerned about family violence. We can all take steps to make our community safer. A good place to start is by creating awareness in the workplace.

## WHO?

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Who plans an information session on abuse and neglect of older adults? You can. You can organize a workplace information session by getting a group together and using this handbook as a guide to start a discussion.

It is a good idea to share the role of leading the discussion so that one of you is available to leave the group if someone becomes upset and needs private, individual support and information before the session ends. Talking about abuse is not easy and people who have

been affected by it may need to talk to someone about places to go for help.

Be sure both of you review the guide before the information session, especially the COMMUNITY RESOURCE LIST and the section called CARING COMMUNICATION.

Afterwards, at the end of the session, allow additional time so that you can respond to any requests for information or help.

## ABUSE AND NEGLECT OF OLDER ADULTS

You won't personally have all the answers to people's questions about family violence and abuse of older people, but you can contact people in the community who can provide more information. You don't need to be an expert about abuse and neglect of older adults to plan a session. You do need to:

- have an interest in the subject;
- read the enclosed materials; and
- complete the COMMUNITY RESOURCE LIST.

Identify key people who may offer their support. Some workplaces have people on site with a special interest in issues affecting employees. Contact, in advance, representatives of any employee assistance, union counselling or occupational health programs or other resources such as well-being or health and safety committees. These people may be willing to help you organize an information session or might like to attend. In any case, they should know that the session is being planned, not only as a courtesy, but because they may possibly experience an increase in the number of employees asking for help.

## **WHERE?**

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This guide is designed for use in the workplace, but could also be used in home or community settings.

In your workplace, check policy about the use of meeting rooms. A quiet room is best. There may be a classroom or boardroom in your workplace that could be booked for the session. A private office can be used depending on the number of people attending. A separate section of a cafeteria or staff room may be suitable.

If there is an employee assistance program or a union counsellor in your workplace, ask them for ideas about where to hold the session.

If you do not receive approval for a workplace meeting or if no suitable space is available, you can make arrangements to meet some place else like a library, local church, YWCA, community centre or seniors' centre. Any of these may say "yes" to your request.

## **WHEN?**

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The STEP BY STEP GUIDE has been designed in a 55 minute format so that it can be used during a noon hour, at a shift change or whenever convenient.

It is also possible that your employer may be willing to offer work time for the session. This is because family violence, including violence toward older adults, affects workers' lives, and may cause illness, absenteeism, and lack of concentration resulting in low productivity or possible injury.



## HOW?

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Decide on a time and place. Ask somebody else to help, and decide who will do what. Then:

### 1. *Let people know.*

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You may decide to simply invite a number of people who you think may have an interest in this topic. Or you can advertise, using posters on bulletin boards. But remember that permission may be required before putting up posters on bulletin boards in the workplace.

A sample poster is included in this handbook. To use "as is," enter the time and location

information, and then photocopy on brightly coloured paper.

About ten people is a good number for an information session, but more or fewer will work equally well. If you invite people, you will have a sense of how many are coming. A group can't be too small - you and someone else can use the guide effectively.

### 2. *Complete the COMMUNITY RESOURCE LIST handout in advance.*

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This form is provided in the back of the handbook. It is very helpful to participants if local telephone numbers are written on the handout. So before the information session date, look up and fill in at least one emergency number and any community service information number that may be available. Any single enquiry number will be able to refer you to others.

Some key resources are available in nearly every town or community in our country. The

telephone book is the best source for these numbers but the local library or information centre may be able to tell you how to reach services that are in your area.

Telephone numbers are important because people who attend the information session need to know where help is available in their community. Some people may not say anything specific at the time, but having a list of resources to take away with them could make all the difference in the future.

### 3. *Do some reading and preparation in advance:*

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- read the TIPS FOR PRESENTERS;
- read the STEP BY STEP GUIDE;
- read the National Clearinghouse on Family Violence fact sheet on Elder Abuse included in the handbook;
- photocopy the completed COMMUNITY RESOURCE LIST, agenda and other

handouts. Make enough copies for all the people you expect to attend the session. After the information session, post any spare resource lists on bulletin boards that are available for staff use; and

- prepare pieces of paper or bring recipe cards and pencils for use in the EXAMPLES exercise.

Good luck with your awareness session.

## TIPS FOR PRESENTERS

- 1.** You and the group are here to explore family violence issues together. Be yourself. Your feeling comfortable and relaxed will help contribute to an informal, friendly atmosphere.
- 2.** Your role is that of a group facilitator, not an expert. **It is not up to you to come up with all the answers or solutions.** *"My role today is to act as a guide during this discussion on family violence."*
- 3.** Adults bring to any learning situation a wide range of knowledge and experience. It is helpful to recognize and, if appropriate, acknowledge this. *"You've had a lot of experience with this issue, Jane...."*
- 4.** Family violence issues are not easy to talk about. Feelings of sadness or anger may surface during the presentation. Acknowledging those feelings can be helpful. Say something like the following: *"That must have been very upsetting for you, Asif...."*
- 5.** It's a good idea to follow the timing suggestions on the agenda. If the group is particularly interested in one topic, you may wish to ask for a group decision: should they proceed with the agenda or stay with the topic under discussion? *"We only have 10 minutes left and three more sections to cover. How would you like to proceed?"* Meeting again another day may be an option. Or you may decide not to complete the session but to give out the handbooks.
- 6.** It's important to acknowledge **all** comments with a nod, smile or a brief *"Thanks"* whether or not the comments fit the agenda.
- 7.** Sometimes a group member may go off on a tangent, expressing strongly held beliefs they want to talk about. You may wish to say something like the following: *"I understand your concern about...., but today we are discussing...."*
- 8.** From time to time, it may be helpful to refer back to key points made earlier in the presentation. *"Remember when we talked earlier about the role of power and control in family violence?"*
- 9.** Some participants may experience strong emotions and want to talk to somebody privately. Have back-up partner who can assist you. This allows you to continue with the presentation while your partner offers support and information about help available in your community.
- 10.** Thank the group for coming. *"Family violence is a tough subject to talk about. Concerned people like yourselves can make a difference. Thanks for coming!"*

Developed by Brenda Defoe

# STEP BY STEP GUIDE

## 1

AS PEOPLE COME IN...

**Give them a copy of the COMMUNITY RESOURCE LIST, a copy of the QUIZ and an agenda.**

- ask them to fill out the QUIZ;
- let them know the quiz will be discussed later;
- briefly go over the agenda with the group to let them know how the hour will be organized.

## 2

INTRODUCE YOURSELF AND MEMBERS OF THE GROUP (about 5 minutes)

**Begin by introducing yourself and any co-presenter.**

Mention:

- why you decided to organize this session;
- time limitations: "We have only 55 minutes for the session today and a lot to cover as you can see by the agenda...";
- that family violence is an emotional topic that for some of us is hard to talk about;
- that it is a complex issue with no simple solutions;
- that people who want to get more information can see you afterwards;
- that, if for any reason someone needs to leave before the session has ended, they should feel free to do so; and
- that people are invited to add comments or ask questions during the session.

**Introduce group members.**

Look over the group and decide:

- does everyone already know each other?
- is the group so large that introductions will take too much time?
- will some people feel uncomfortable going through an introduction exercise?

If any of these points apply, skip this section and move on to the Overview section. If you decide to do introductions, a quick way to ensure that every one has met at least two people is to:

- ask participants to turn to the person on their left and introduce themselves; then
- turn to the person on their right and do the same.

### 3

#### ABUSE & NEGLECT OF OLDER ADULTS: AN OVERVIEW (about 10 minutes)

**Begin by clarifying what we mean by older adults.**

When we use the term "older adults," we are generally referring to people over the age of 60.

**Acknowledge that abuse and neglect of older adults is an emotional issue.**

Discussing this topic can affect people in several ways. They may be concerned because of a personal experience involving a family member, an older friend or a relative. They may also be dealing with their own feelings about growing older.

**You could say:**

Any kind of abuse or neglect is hard for some of us to talk about. Talking about the abuse and neglect of older adults can bring up thoughts and fears about our own aging, our own vulnerability, or the aging of those close to us.

**Clarify what we mean by abuse and neglect of older adults.**

**You could say:**

You may have heard abuse and neglect of older adults referred to as "elder abuse." Now we commonly use the term "older adult" instead of terms such as "elder," "senior," "elderly," etc.

Most older adults enjoy a happy, healthy relationship with their families and friends. But studies suggest that at least 4% of older adults may be abused or neglected. "Abuse and neglect" refers to **any action or inaction that threatens the well-being of an older person**. Abuse may be physical, emotional, sexual, or financial. Neglecting the needs of an older person is also abuse. Under or over medication or the violation of an older person's civil or human rights is also abuse. An example of civil rights abuse would be not allowing the older adult to have visitors.

**Mention what is known about the abuse and neglect of older adults.**

**You could say:**

**Abuse and neglect of older adults is not a new problem, but it is only in recent years that it has been recognized as a serious problem.** It is a very complex issue with no simple solutions.

In our society, people are not all treated as equals, and those who are less powerful are more vulnerable to abuse. Abuse and neglect is the result of this kind of power imbalance between people: between children and parents/guardians, men and women, younger people and older people, persons with and without disabilities. Although both older men and women may be abused, those abused most frequently are women.

People who abuse older adults are usually in a position of power and trust. In many cases, the abuser is dependent on the older person in some way and may or may not live in the same house. Abusers may have mental health difficulties of their own or be dependent on drugs or alcohol. In many cases, the older person and the abuser are socially isolated. Regardless of the circumstances, no one has the right to abuse another person.

**Ask the group for questions or comments on the information so far.**

**Then say:**

Looking after another person can be stressful and care givers need information, assistance and coping skills. However, stress is not an excuse for abuse or neglect. When abuse of an older adult occurs in a care-giving situation, it is often a continuation of a pattern of family violence: "spouse abuse grown old." Using violence or neglect to solve problems may be a long-term family pattern.

Attitudes and misconceptions about older people in our society can also lead to abuse and neglect. An example might be the belief that older people are incompetent and, therefore, cannot manage their own money. Abuse and neglect can also occur in institutions such as nursing homes, hospitals and long term care facilities.

## **4** EXAMPLES (about 10 minutes)

**Begin by handing out pencils and blank pieces of paper or recipe cards.**

**Give participants directions.**

**You could say:**

Think of an example of a situation you know about personally or have heard about in which an older adult was either abused or neglected. Take a minute to write down a phrase or a sentence describing the situation.

Please leave out any names.

I will read some of the examples aloud and ask you as a group to identify the type of abuse described on the card. This exercise will give us a better idea of what abuse and neglect of older adults is about.

**Then collect the cards and read some examples out loud (Or, if it is a small group, read and discuss all the examples).**

As you read each example, ask the group to identify the type of abuse or neglect.

**Ask the group:**

"Who holds the power or trust in the situation described?"

**Here is an example:**

A card describes a situation involving a woman whose husband refuses to spend money on the medication she needs.

- Is this abusive?
- What kind of abuse is it? (it is medication abuse and neglect and financial abuse.)
- Who has the power in this situation? Why?

Possible responses include:

"Because he's the head of the household";  
"Perhaps he controls the household money";  
etc.

# 5

## CARING COMMUNICATION

(about 10 minutes)

**You could say:**

What can we do if we think an older adult is being abused or neglected? Sometimes we are hesitant to interfere in another person's life. But older adults who are being abused or neglected may have a difficult time reaching out to others. We may need to reach out **to them**.

**Give out the CARING COMMUNICATION** **handout.**

**You could say:**

Awareness of possible abuse and neglect of older adults is the first step in preventing abuse and in helping those who are being abused. Being here today is part of that first step. We need to be willing to help and we need to know how to help. We need to believe that older adults have a future!

If you suspect an older adult is being abused, tell them directly and respectfully why you are concerned about them. Asking directly tells the older adult that you care and are willing to listen. Tell them that the conversation will be kept confidential and that you won't take any action without their consent.

**Now briefly discuss the CARING COMMUNICATION handout.**

**You could say:**

Caring communication means helping to make it easier to talk about abuse and neglect by listening to people and accepting what they say about their own experiences.

Caring communication:

- **is confidential:** "What we talk about today is just between us...";
- **includes "I" messages:** "I am concerned about you...";
- **is specific:** "...because I haven't seen you out in the yard and today I see a bruise on your arm";
- **is sensitive to others' feelings:** "I understand that it's hard to talk about personal concerns...";
- **is non-judgmental and non-threatening:** "Would you like to talk to me about it?";
- **empowers rather than "rescues"\*:** "Do you want to talk about some of the resources you might want to use?";
- **is respectful of older adults' right to make their own decisions in their own time;** and
- **is prepared to assist the older person to find professional help.**

\* Mention to participants that "rescuing" refers to making decisions for someone and then carrying out those decisions for the other person. "Rescue" efforts undermine confidence, whereas empowerment encourages people to make their own decisions in their own best interest and their own time.



## **6** DISCUSS THE QUIZ (about 10 minutes)

**Ask participants to find the QUIZ they completed earlier.**

**Read each question and answer aloud. All are FALSE.**

1. Abuse of older adults is not related to other forms of family violence.
2. It is easy for older adults to talk about abuse.

They may wish to follow the questions and their personal responses as you read aloud each question and answer. Do not ask people about their answers to these questions. The object of the activity is to clarify common misconceptions about abuse and neglect of older adults.

Depending on time, you may want to encourage discussion after each point. Not everyone will necessarily agree with the answers and may raise what seem like unrelated issues. Some responses you might use are:

- "What do others think?"
- "That sounds like a topic for another discussion."
- "I'll write down that question and contact someone who can give us more information."

**Fact:** Older people who are abused may describe a life pattern involving physical, emotional, or sexual abuse. Abuse and neglect of older adults is a form of family violence like child or spouse abuse.

**Fact:** It is not easy to talk about abuse at any age. Older adults have difficulty telling about the abuse because they may:

- be unaware that what they are experiencing is abuse;
- be unaware that help is available or not know who to call;
- be afraid of the abuser or of being sent to an institution;
- have a physical or mental disability which makes reporting difficult or impossible;
- lack financial resources;
- blame themselves;
- be ashamed or embarrassed; or
- continue to hope that the abuse will stop without their taking action.

3. Older men are not abused.

**Fact:** Both women and men are victims of abuse and neglect, although more women than men are abused.

4. Abuse and neglect of older adults.

**Fact:** Abuse can occur both in the home and in institutional settings such as seniors' residences, long term care facilities, hospitals and nursing homes.

5. It is easy to recognize when older adults are being abused or neglected.

**Fact:** Because violence is a complicated issue, abuse may not be obvious. But there are indicators that may signal abuse or neglect. They include:

- unexplained injuries such as bruises or burns,
- isolation from friends or family,
- an unkempt appearance, or missing dentures, glasses or hearing aid,
- untreated medical problems,
- discrepancy between known income and the person's standard of living,
- lack of self-esteem, and
- unexplained nervousness.

6. The abuse and neglect of older adults is the direct result of care giver stress.

**Fact:** Care giver stress is a real problem, but it is not an excuse for abuse or neglect of older adults. It is important not to excuse an individual's violent behaviour on the grounds of stress.

7. Some cultures do not abuse or neglect older adults.

**Fact:** Many people think cultures that stress respect for its older members do not abuse and neglect them. This is not necessarily true. Abuse and neglect can occur in any community.

8. Older adults don't have to worry about sexual assault, sexual harassment, or dating violence.

**Fact:** Sexual harassment and sexual assault can happen to older adults as well as to younger people. For example, an older adult may experience violence and exploitation in a dating relationship.

9. The majority of older adults need assistance in managing their business and personal affairs.

**Fact:** The majority of older adults are quite capable and able to manage their business affairs and personal relationships.

# 7

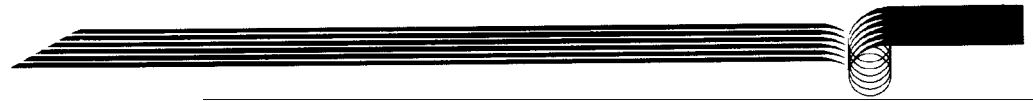
## WIND UP: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? (about 5 minutes)

During the last 5 minutes of the presentation, you may want to ask the group if they would like to meet again to:

- continue discussion on family violence awareness (particularly if you ran out of time and did not finish the session);
- listen to a speaker from the community talk about the abuse and neglect of older adults and what services are available in this community;
- view a video on family violence issues; and/or
- discuss another family violence topic such as child sexual abuse or wife assault. Session guides on these topics can be obtained free from the National Clearinghouse on Family Violence.

Mention that you will be available for the next few minutes should anyone have a question or concern. (If someone has a specific concern, make sure they know about any employee assistance or union counselling program that may be available in your workplace. Refer to the **COMMUNITY RESOURCE LIST** for other suggestions of where your colleague can go for help.)

Thank the group for coming to the session.



# Elder Abuse

Information from ...

## The National Clearinghouse on Family Violence

### What is Elder Abuse?

There is no universal agreement on what constitutes elder abuse; however, the term is generally used to mean "the physical, psychosocial or financial mistreatment of a senior." Seniors may be vulnerable because of frailty, poor health, and financial and emotional dependency. Neglect is commonly associated with abuse.

**Physical abuse** involves assault, rough handling, sexual abuse, or the withholding of physical necessities such as food, personal care, hygienic care, or medical care.<sup>1</sup>

**Psychosocial abuse** involves verbal assault, social isolation, lack of affection, or denying seniors the chance to participate in decisions with respect to their own lives.

**Financial abuse** involves the misuse of money or property. This can include fraud or using the funds of elders for purposes contrary

**Neglect** can lead to any of these three types of abuse, and can be either active or passive. In passive neglect, the caregiver does not intend to injure the dependent elder; neglect is active when the caregiver consciously fails to meet the needs of the elder.

### How Widespread is the Problem?

As the problem of elder abuse has only recently come to public attention, there are few statistics on the incidence and prevalence of elder abuse. Even available figures are likely understated, as victims of abuse are reluctant to identify themselves.

A national Canadian study on the occurrence of elder abuse was conducted in 1989.<sup>2</sup> The survey contacted 2000 elders in private dwellings to obtain information on the 91% of Canadian seniors who reside in private dwellings. The findings indicate the following:

- Approximately 4% of elders in Canadian private dwellings (approximately 98 000 people) reported being abused.
- Financial abuse is the most prevalent type of abuse, affecting 60 000 Canadian elders. It is more likely to be perpetrated by a distant relative or a non-relative than by a close family member. Only 7% of financial abusers are financially dependent on their elderly victims.
- Chronic verbal aggression, a component of psychosocial abuse, affects approximately 34 000 elderly Canadians.
- More than 18 000 elderly persons in Canada are subjected to more than one type of abuse.
- Approximately 12 000 seniors in Canada experience physical abuse. Victims of physical abuse are more likely than non-victims to be married. In the majority of cases, the abusers are spouses of the victim.
- Female victims of abuse outnumber male victims by approximately 5:3; however, this is roughly the same as the ratio of elderly women to men in the general population.

## **Facts to Consider**

### *The Victim*

- The age, gender, marital status, ethnicity, and income level of victims of elder abuse do not differ significantly from those of elders who are not victims.<sup>3</sup>

- Elders often do not take any action against their abusers. They may be ashamed, embarrassed, and unwilling to risk being rejected by loved ones.<sup>4</sup>
- Victims often rationalize abuse, blaming themselves in the belief that they once hurt the abuser.
- Victims abused by their sons or daughters occasionally feel inadequate and embarrassed, and blame themselves for poor child rearing.<sup>5</sup>
- Victims are usually reluctant to admit abuse is taking place and often refuse an offer of assistance. Elders would often rather endure the present situation than risk being sent to an institution.

### *The Abuser*

- Those entrusted to care for an elder do not always have the necessary resources (knowledge, space, family support, family assistance, time, finances, temperament, or desire).<sup>6</sup>
- Abuse may be a consequence of the caregiver's personal problems, such as unemployment, drug or alcohol abuse, or failing personal relationships.
- Abuse may result when caregivers feel resentment toward an elder because of the loss of independence that comes with the responsibility of having to care for someone.<sup>7</sup>
- When questioned about the care being provided to the elder, it is natural for an abuser to show irritation or resentment by being evasive or refusing to answer at all.

## **Detecting Abuse**

The following may indicate abuse; if you notice any of these symptoms or conditions, contact one of the support services listed below.

### *Physical Abuse Indicators*

- frequent unexplained injuries (bruises, broken limbs, welts, cuts, and grip marks), accompanied by a habit of seeking medical assistance from a variety of locations
- reluctance to seek medical treatment for injuries or denial of their existence
- disorientation or grogginess (may indicate the misuse of medication)
- fear and edginess in the presence of a caregiver or family member

### *Psychosocial Abuse Indicators*

- exclusion of an older person from discussions on major decisions
- absence of emotional warmth toward the elder
- social isolation - whether physically or emotionally imposed
- verbal assault (shouting, infantilization, degrading remarks)

### *Material Abuse Indicators*

- cashing of pension cheques without proper authorization from the elder
- bills and expenses continuously unpaid
- standard of living not appropriate for an elder's income level
- sudden sale of property belonging to a

senior person

- sudden revision of the elder's will, naming a new beneficiary
- disproportionately high contribution by the elder to household expenses
- granting of power of attorney under suspicious conditions

### *Indicators of Neglect*

- malnutrition in an older person who cannot get food without help
- decline in personal hygiene
- disregard of elder in family affairs
- lack of needed medication or aids
- lack of material needs of life

## **Where to go for Support Services**

- Police department
- Distress centre
- Hospital
- Mental health centre
- Social service agency
- Senior citizen home or day care centre
- Advocacy centre
- Public health department

## **What can be done to Prevent Elder Abuse?**

The following list combines suggestions for individuals, groups and governments

addressing the problem of elder abuse. Many of the areas are controversial and require more evaluation.

- Hold discussions between elders and potential caregivers focusing on the expectations of the elder for future arrangements.<sup>8</sup>
- Seriously consider plans to resettle elders into a private dwelling and consult all affected individuals. This would help to lessen negative feelings and preclude abuse.<sup>9</sup>
- Incorporate education on the aging process and elder abuse into the curricula of educational facilities.<sup>10</sup>
- Establish support groups to educate and counsel caregivers on emotional strains that can result from the responsibility of caring for a dependent adult.
- Establish groups and services (day care facilities, financial aid and homemaker services) to assist caregivers with daily responsibilities.<sup>11</sup> This would reduce the strain experienced by caregivers and increase the number of people in contact with elders, thereby increasing opportunities for identifying abuse.
- Establish counselling services and self-help groups to assist elders with problems and promote seniors' independence.
- Set up safe houses to provide abused elders with temporary respite.
- Set up advocacy programs in which an agent looks after legal and other interests on behalf of the elderly person. The agent can have obligations to parallel those of a trustee.<sup>12</sup>
- Ensure that available information, programs, and services are well publicized.
- Develop standard identification and intervention protocols to deal with suspected cases of elder abuse.<sup>13</sup>

- Establish registries for documenting suspected cases of elder abuse. This would show whether an individual has previously been suspected of abuse.
- Investigate the merit of legislation making it mandatory to report to the authorities any reasonable suspicion that an elder is being abused.

## Suggested Reading

- *A Review of the Social and Legal Issues Concerning Elder Abuse*. Joseph P. Hornick, Lynn McDonald, Gerald B. Robertson, and Jean E. Wallace. Calgary: Canadian Research Institute for Law and the Family, 1988.
- *Conflict in the Family*. K. Pillemer and R. Wolf, eds. Dover, Massachusetts: Auburn House, 1986.
- *Duty Bound: Elder Abuse and Family Care*. Suzanne K. Steinmetz. Newbury Park, California: Sage Productions, 1988.
- *Elder Abuse and Neglect*. Alberta Senior Citizens Secretariat. Edmonton: Alberta Senior Citizens Secretariat, 1988.
- *Elder Abuse and Neglect*. Mary Joe Quinn and Susan K. Tomita. New York: Springer Publishing Company, 1986.
- *Enhancing Awareness of Elder Abuse: Three Education Models*. Ottawa: Council on Aging of Ottawa-Carleton, 1988.
- *Protection of the Elderly: A Study of Elder Abuse*. Donna J. Shell. Winnipeg: [Department of National Health and Welfare], 1982.
- *Violence et personnes âgées*. Bélanger et al. Montréal: Les Cahiers de l'association québécoise de gérontologie, 1981.

*Audiovisual*: The Family Prevention Division of Health and Welfare Canada has compiled films and videos on elder abuse which can be borrowed free of charge through the regional offices of the National Film Board.

## Endnotes

1. Donna J. Shell, *Protection of the Elderly: A Study of Elder Abuse* (Winnipeg: Department of National Health and Welfare, 1982), p. 24.
2. Elizabeth Podnieks et al., *National Survey on Abuse of the Elderly in Canada* (Toronto: Ryerson Polytechnical Institute, 1990). Copies available from National Clearinghouse on Family Violence.
3. Joseph P. Hornick et al., *A Review of the Social and Legal Issues Concerning Elder Abuse* (Calgary: Canadian Research Institute for Law and the Family, 1988), p. vii.
4. Wendy Johnson-Brown, *Abuse of Elderly Women* (Winnipeg: Senior Women Against Abuse Collective, 1989), p. 22.
5. Suzanne K. Steinmetz, "Elder Abuse," *Aging*, Feb. 1981, p. 7.
6. Nancy Gnaedinger, *Elder Abuse: A Discussion Paper* (Ottawa: National Clearinghouse on Family Violence, 1989), p. 18.
7. Elizabeth Podnieks, "Elder Abuse: It's Time We Did Something About It," *The Canadian Nurse*, Vol. 81, #11, December 1985. Offprints available from National Clearinghouse on Family Violence.
8. Gnaedinger, *ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. Podnieks, *National Survey*, p. 83.
11. Shell, p. 19.
12. Mary Ellen Welsh, *Report on Focus on Elder Abuse Workshop* (Regina: University of Regina, 1989), p. 23.
13. Council on Aging of Ottawa-Carleton, *Enhancing Awareness of Elder Abuse: Three Education Models*, March 1988.



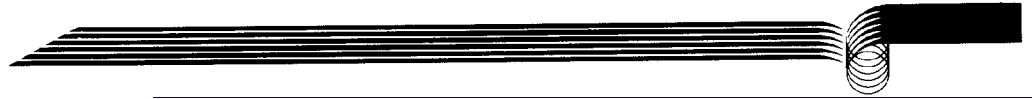
This document was prepared by Natalie I. Migus. The contribution of the following individuals is gratefully acknowledged: Jeanette Bartlett, Seniors Secretariat, Health and Welfare Canada; Dick Carr, Saskatchewan Seniors Directorate; Catherine Luke, Ontario Office for Senior Citizens; John Angus Mackenzie, Nova Scotia Senior Citizens Secretariat; Judy Murakami, Ministry of Health; Elizabeth Podnieks, Ryerson Polytechnical Institute of Toronto; Dr. Vincent Sacco, Queen's University; Diets Habets, Gordon E. Phaneuf, Sue Tracey and Meena Trotman, Family Violence Prevention Division, Health and Welfare Canada.

For further information on elder abuse or other family violence issues, contact:

**National Clearinghouse on Family Violence  
Family Violence Prevention Division  
Social Service Programs Branch  
Health and Welfare Canada  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1A 1B5  
(613) 957-2938**

**or call toll free number, 1-800-267-1291**

November, 1990



# Financial Abuse of Seniors

Information from ...

## The National Clearinghouse on Family Violence

### 1. What is the financial abuse of seniors?

- Financial abuse refers to the misuse or a senior's money, property or other assets by a relative or a person in a position of trust. A relative may be a spouse, sibling, or child, and a person in position of trust may be a neighbour, home care worker, or staff person in a care facility. Financial abuse by strangers is not included in this fact sheet.

Some examples are:<sup>1</sup>

- Forcing or tricking a senior into selling his or her property;
- Stealing money or personal possessions;
- Forcing a senior's signature on pension cheques or legal documents;
- Misusing a Power of Attorney;<sup>2</sup>

- Pressuring a senior to provide services for no payment.<sup>3</sup>

- Financial abuse is one type of elder abuse and it is sometimes referred to a material abuse.
- Financial abuse **IS** a crime.<sup>4</sup>
- Often when seniors are financially exploited, they are subject to other forms of mistreatment, such as physical or psychological abuse or neglect.

### 2. How widespread is the problem?

- As with other types of elder abuse, it is difficult to determine the extent to which seniors are being financially abused in Canada. This difficulty arises primarily from a failure to recognize or acknowledge that financial abuse is occurring.<sup>5</sup> As well, the abuse of seniors is an emerging issue and research in the area is still developing.

- A number of small-scale studies conducted in various parts of Canada found that financial or material abuse was the most frequently reported type of elder abuse.<sup>6</sup>
- The *National Survey on Abuse of the Elderly in Canada: The Ryerson Study*, conducted in 1989 found that financial abuse was reported most often and accounted for over 50% of the documented elder abuse cases. The study estimated that at least 60,000 senior Canadians in private dwellings were victims of financial abuse.<sup>7</sup>

### **3. Facts to consider**

- Victims and abusers come from all geographic, economic, social, and cultural backgrounds.
- Seniors with lower literacy levels may be vulnerable to financial abuse because they may depend on others to handle their finances, fill out forms, and read government notices.<sup>8</sup>
- Some older immigrants and seniors from ethnocultural groups may also be susceptible to financial abuse if they are isolated and lack communication skills in the official languages. As well, immigrant seniors may not be familiar with their rights in Canada.<sup>9</sup>
- Seniors may not disclose financial abuse because they feel ashamed, guilty, fearful, or they may wish to protect the abuser. A physical or mental impairment can also make reporting difficult.<sup>10</sup>
- Although various factors contribute to the financial abuse of seniors, many authorities believe that it is primarily caused by greed. Other contributing factors may include: the personal problems of an abuser, such as substance abuse or unemployment; a pattern of family violence; and negative stereotypes of seniors.<sup>11</sup>

## 4. Detecting financial abuse

- Financial abuse is often difficult to detect and frequently occurs over a long period of time.<sup>12</sup>
- Some behavioral indicators of financially abused seniors are:
  - Sudden removal of large sums of money from a bank account;
  - Unexplained inability to pay bills, purchase food or personal care items;
  - Fear or anxiety when discussing finances or being visited by a family member only when pension cheques arrive;
  - inaccurate or no knowledge of finances;
  - Unexpected revision of a will or sale of property;
  - Complaints of belongings such as clothing, jewelry or cigarettes disappearing from his or her room in an institution.

In some instances these indicators are non-abusive and further investigation is required to determine if financial abuse is occurring.<sup>13</sup>

- If abuse is suspected, ask the senior directly if someone is financially exploiting him or her. If questions are asked in a respectful manner, the senior may feel confident to disclose his or her situation. Contact one of the support services listed in Section 6 for further information and assistance.

## 5. Intervention

- Seniors are a diverse group of individuals who require personalized responses when in financially abusive situations. An

intervention plan should be sensitive to the needs of the senior, provide practical options for change, and empower the individual to regain control over his or her life.<sup>14</sup>

- As is the case with all adults, every senior has the right to self determination which means he or she has the right to accept or reject help. To respect this right, interventions should be directed by the wishes of the senior unless he or she is mentally incompetent.<sup>15</sup>
- Possible interventions are:
  - Providing information on financial abuse and support services;
  - Advocating for the rights of the senior;
  - Helping the senior interact with a support network;
  - Exploring other living arrangements;
  - Assisting with legal procedures.

## 6. Where to go for support services

- Community legal aid clinic or legal aid services<sup>16</sup>
- Police station
- Local health or social service agency
- Local bank or financial institution
- Public Trustee's Office<sup>17</sup>

## 7. Preventing financial abuse<sup>18,19</sup>

*As a senior:*

- Maintain your network of friends and acquaintances.

- Learn to recognize the indicators of financial abuse listed in Section 4.
- Become informed of your financial position, including property, bank accounts and possessions.
- Keep your money in a bank or financial institution rather than in your home to avoid the risk of theft. Arrange to have pension cheques deposited directly into your bank account.
- Agree upon a schedule of repayment before you loan money to a relative.
- Find a lawyer sensitive to seniors' issues to help prepare or revise a will. A lawyer can also offer advice on arrangements you can make now for possible future incapacity.
- Review your will periodically and make revisions only after serious consideration.
- Have a person you trust review documents that you are uncertain about before you sign them.
- *If you are being financially abused, talk to someone you trust.* This may be a physician, member of the clergy, police officer, neighbour, or relative.

***As a family member or friend:***

- Maintain close ties with older relatives and friends.
- Discuss financial matters and power of attorney with your older relative or friend in the event of his or her incapacity.
- if you suspect financial abuse is occurring, support the older person and obtain information about available options from existing services.

***As a service provider:***

- Assume that seniors are competent. Under Canadian law, seniors are considered capable of making decisions for themselves until otherwise proven.<sup>20</sup>
- Adapt or develop protocols for the identification and investigation of suspected cases of financial abuse.
- Establish or support training programs which familiarize service providers to the issue of financial abuse and appropriate interventions.
- Promote a multidisciplinary approach to respond to financial abuse.
- Publicize available support services for seniors and develop appropriate outreach services.

***As a media professional:***

- Promote positive images of seniors.
- Avoid sensationalizing cases of financial abuse by focusing on prevention and the empowerment of seniors.
- Increase public awareness of financial abuse through the mainstream, aboriginal and multicultural media.

***As a community:***

- Challenge negative perceptions of seniors in our society.
- Strive to develop positive attitudes about aging and seniors.
- Mobilize community action to involve all Canadian citizens in the prevention of financial and other forms of abuse.

## 8. Suggested readings

Committee on Abuse of the Elderly (1989) Growing Old... and Remaining Free: Report of

the Committee on the Abuse of the Elderly. Quebec: Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, Direction des communications.

Richard L. Douglass (1987) Domestic Mistreatment of the Elderly: Towards Prevention. Washington, D.C.: American Association of Retired Persons.

Robert M. Gordon (1987) "Financial Abuse of the Elderly and State 'Protective Services': Changing Strategies in the Penal-Welfare Complex in the United States and Canada." In Crime and Social Justice, No. 26, pp. 116-134.

P. Lynn McDonald, Joseph P. Hornick, Gerald B. Robertson & Jean E. Wallace (1991) Elder Abuse and Neglect in Canada. Toronto: Butterworths.

Judith A. Wahl & Sheila Purdy (1991) Elder Abuse: The Hidden Crime. Toronto: Advocacy Centre for the Elderly & Community Legal Education Ontario.

Audiovisual: The Family Violence Prevention Division of Health and Welfare Canada has films and videos on elder abuse which can be borrowed through the regional offices of the National Film Board. Highly recommended is the video on financial abuse entitled, "Standing up for Yourself."

## 9. Endnotes

1. Judith A. Wahl & Sheila Purdy (1991) Elder Abuse: The Hidden Crime. Toronto: Advocacy Centre for the Elderly & Community Legal Education Ontario, p. 3.
2. A Power of Attorney is a legal document which allows a mentally competent senior to give another person the power to act on his or her behalf in financial and legal matters. A senior has the right to cancel the Power of Attorney at any time. Unless otherwise indicated, the Power of Attorney ends when

the senior becomes incompetent or dies. Variations in Powers of Attorney exist between the provinces and territories so contact your lawyer for more information.

3. Toronto Mayor's Committee on A Subcommittee on Crime and Abuse (1989) "Proceedings of the Forum on Elder Abuse - Cultural Perspectives". Unpublished document, pp. 7, 9, 11.
4. For example, theft and fraud are offenses under the Canadian Criminal Code. Judith A. Wahl & Sheila Purdy, 1991, p. 3.
5. Nancy Gnaedinger (1989) "Elder Abuse: A Discussion Paper." Ottawa: Family Violence Prevention Division.
6. For example see Donna J. Shell (1982) Protection of the Elderly: A Study of Elder Abuse. Winnipeg: Department of National Health and Welfare & Carol Stevenson (1985) Family Abuse of the Elderly in Alberta. Edmonton: Alberta Social Services and Community Health.
7. Elizabeth Podnieks et al. (1990) National Survey on Abuse of the Elderly in Canada: The Ryerson Study. Toronto: Ryerson Polytechnical Institute.
8. Andrew Aitkens (1991) A National Literacy Strategy for Older Canadians. Ottawa: One Voice, p. 14.
9. Toronto Mayor's Committee on Aging, Subcommittee on Crime and Abuse (1989), pp. 7, 9, 11.
10. Judith A. Wahl & Sheila Purdy (1991), p. 8.
11. Richard L. Douglass (1987) Domestic Mistreatment of the Elderly: Towards Prevention. Washington, D.C.: American Association of Retired

Persons.

12. Robert M. Gordon (1987) "Financial Abuse of the Elderly and State 'Protective Services': Changing Strategies in the Penal-Welfare Complex in the United States and Canada." In Crime and Social Justice, No. 26, p. 117.
13. Pamela Ansell & Risa Breckman (1988) Elder Mistreatment Guidelines for Health Care Professionals: Detection, Assessment and Intervention. New York: Mount Sinai/Victim Services Agency Elder Abuse Project, pp. 10-17.
14. Office for the Prevention of Family Violence (1985) Elder Abuse and Neglect. Alberta: Alberta Family and Social Services, p. 12.
15. Ibid.
16. There are variations in legal aid services among the provinces and territories.
17. Each province and territory has a Public Trustee's office with different names but similar structure and function to provide protective services for mentally incompetent people. i.e. the Administrator of Estates, the Public Curator.
18. Nancy Gnaedinger (1989).
19. Richard L. Douglass (1987).
20. Judith Sylph (1987) "Legal Issues in the Care of Mentally Impaired Elderly Persons: Competence, Surrogate Management, and Protection of Rights" in Canada's Mental Health, Vol. 35, No. 2, June 1987, pp. 6-11.

This document was prepared under contract by

Teresa Lukawiecki. The contribution of the following individuals is gratefully acknowledged: Katalin Kennedy, Anne Patenaude, Femmy Mes, Barbara Merriam, Gordon Phaneuf, and Janice Ireland, Family Violence Prevention Division, Health and Welfare Canada; Joan Simpson, Mental Health Division; Jane Dowell, Seniors Independence Program; Louise Plouffe, National Advisory Council on Aging; Jeanette Bartlett, Seniors Secretariat; Judith Wahl, Advocacy Centre for the Elderly; Linda duRocher, Ottawa Civic Hospital; Joan Bell; G.D. Mitchell; Pearl McKenzie, North Shore Community Services; Marie Beaulieu, Ph.D., Université du Québec à Rimouski; Ellen Lougheed; Rod Adachi and Caroline Pinto, Alberta Multiculturalism Commission; Kathy Yurkowski, Manitoba Seniors Directorate; and Ivan Hale, One Voice.

For further information and publications on elder abuse or other family violence issues, contact:

**National Clearinghouse on Family Violence  
Family Violence Prevention Division  
Social Service Programs Branch  
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(613) 957-2938**

or call the toll free number,  
**1-800-267-1291.**



For TDD users, (613) 952-6396 or call  
the toll free number,  
1-800-561-5643

February, 1993



# CHILD ABUSE COMMUNITY RESOURCE LIST

## EMERGENCY SERVICES

Write in local telephone number here

POLICE/RCMP \_\_\_\_\_



911 (if available), or  
local detachment number:

HOSPITAL EMERGENCY \_\_\_\_\_



Some of the following resources will be available in your area. Telephone numbers can be found in the telephone book, via Information Services in your community, or by asking representatives of any union counselling or employee assistance programs.

Community Seniors Information Services \_\_\_\_\_



Family Physicians \_\_\_\_\_



Women's Shelters \_\_\_\_\_



Health Units or Hospitals \_\_\_\_\_



Family Counselling Agencies \_\_\_\_\_



Home Care Programs \_\_\_\_\_



Seniors' Housing Information \_\_\_\_\_



1-800-668-6868 (national toll-free line)

Home Support Services \_\_\_\_\_



Meals on Wheels \_\_\_\_\_



Support Groups \_\_\_\_\_



Seniors' Organizations/Centres \_\_\_\_\_



Native Organizations \_\_\_\_\_



Immigrant/Refugee Organizations \_\_\_\_\_



Lawyers or Legal Resources \_\_\_\_\_



Veterans Affairs \_\_\_\_\_



Adult Protection Services: PEI, NB, NS, \_\_\_\_\_



NFLD \_\_\_\_\_



Remember: if a particular resource is unable (or unwilling) to help, try other resources until you find the help you need.

# **ABUSE & NEGLECT OF OLDER ADULTS LET'S TALK ABOUT IT A 55 MINUTE DISCUSSION**

**What is abuse and neglect of older adults?  
How does it affect us?  
Is there help in our community?**

**WHEN?**

\_\_\_\_\_   
Time and date

**WHERE?**

\_\_\_\_\_   
Location/address

**For more information contact:**

\_\_\_\_\_   
**Name(s)**

\_\_\_\_\_   
**Telephone**

Session material is based on information from  
the National Clearinghouse on Family  
Violence,

Family Violence Prevention Division, Health  
Canada, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 1B4.

# **ABUSE AND NEGLECT OF OLDER ADULTS:**

## **AWARENESS INFORMATION FOR PEOPLE IN THE WORKPLACE**

### **AGENDA**

#### **Introductions**

**Overview of  
Abuse and Neglect of Older Adults**

**10 minutes**

**Examples of  
Abuse and Neglect of Older Adults**

**15 minutes**

**Caring Communications**

**10 minutes**

**Discussing the Quiz**

**15 minutes**

**Wind Up: Where do we go from here?**

**5 minutes**

## QUIZ ON ABUSE AND NEGLECT OF OLDER ADULTS

Circle your response: TRUE or FALSE

- |  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| 1. Abuse of older adults is not related to other forms of family violence.                       | T | F |
| 2. It is easy for older adults to talk about abuse.  | T | F |
| 3. Older men are not abused.   | T | F |
| 4. Abuse and neglect of older adults: only happens at home.                                      | T | F |
| 5. It is easy to recognize when older adults are being abused or neglected.                      | T | F |
| 6. The abuse and neglect of older adults is the direct result of care giver stress.              | T | F |
| 7. Some cultures do not abuse or neglect older adults.   | T | F |
| 8. Older adults don't have to worry about sexual assault, sexual harassment or dating violence.  | T | F |
| 9. The majority of older adults need assistance in managing their business and Personal affairs. | T | F |

# CARING COMMUNICATIONS

Caring communication means helping to make it easier to talk about abuse and neglect by listening to people and accepting what they say about their own experiences.

Caring communication:

- **is confidential:** "What we talk about today is just between you and me...";
- **includes "I" messages:** "I am concerned about you...";
- **is specific:** "...because I haven't seen you out in the yard and today I see a bruise on your arm";
- **is sensitive to others' feelings:** "I understand that it's hard to talk about personal concerns...";
- **is non-judgmental and non-threatening:** "Would you like to talk to me about it?";
- **empowers rather than "rescues":** "Do you want to talk about some of the resources you might want to use?";
- **is respectful of older adults' right to make their own decisions:in their own time;** and
- **is prepared to assist the older person to find professional help.**

"Rescuing" refers to making decisions for someone and then carrying out those decisions for the other person. "Rescue" efforts undermine confidence, whereas empowerment encourages older adults to make their own decisions in their own best interest and their own time.