

Fact Sheet

Elder abuse – communication when you have concerns

Many reasons may prevent or deter someone speaking up or talking to someone they trust:

- > feeling embarrassed and ashamed about the actions of a family member
- > not aware of who to talk to or actions to take
- > lack of understanding of abuse and legal and human rights
- > not aware of abuse or does not identify situation as abuse
- > feeling responsible for the abuse
- > dependency on the abuser for food, shelter, clothing, and health care
- > fear of retaliation – afraid of what will happen if the person abusing finds out
- > fear of being placed residential aged care
- > feelings of hopelessness and powerlessness
- > belief that there are no agencies which can help them
- > lack of opportunity to talk about the abuse.

The following are good tips to remember when communicating with someone you think may be experiencing elder abuse:

Be non-judgmental

Do not criticise the abuser or older person for tolerating the abuse. This can make the older person feel defensive and not want to discuss it further. There are many reasons why a person may live in a situation where they are being abused. Focus on the importance of the older person's safety and wellbeing, and that help is available.

Listen, acknowledge, support

Acknowledge how the person is feeling. Reassure them that you believe them and that the abuse is not their fault. Remind them that help and support is available. Support them even they refuse help initially. Help may be accepted later when they feel more confident.

Help identify steps they can take

Prior to any action, it is important to not jeopardise the person's safety. Even if a person does talk about it, they may need your help to get things started. It may help to know who or what agency to speak to, what options are available, or even help the older person identify or collect evidence.

Encourage participation

Isolation is a known risk factor for elder abuse. Encourage the person to stay connected to other people and to activities outside of the home. It is important for people to have a trusted person they can speak to or talk to if elder abuse becomes a reality.

Connect with people who can provide help and guidance

Elder abuse can raise complex social and legal issues. Reassure the person that help is available and encourage them to seek support.

Fact Sheet

Resources

- > Fact Sheet – *What is duty of care?*
- > Fact Sheet – *What is decision making capacity?*
- > Fact Sheet – *What if a person does not consent to take action?*
- > Fact Sheet – *Screening, risk assessment, vulnerability and abuse*
- > Fact Sheet - *When can you share information?*
- > Fact Sheet – *When should you contact police?*

For more information

Office for the Ageing
SA Health
Citi Centre
11 Hindmarsh Square
ADELAIDE SA 5000
Telephone: 8204 2420
www.sahealth.sa.gov.au

Public-I1-A1

© Department for Health and Ageing, Government of South Australia. All rights reserved.



www.ausgoal.gov.au/creative-commons



**Government
of South Australia**

SA Health