



# Crime Prevention Tips Abuse and Neglect of Vulnerable Adults



## Crime Prevention . . . a community responsibility

Abuse and Neglect of Vulnerable Adults means violence against any vulnerable adult or mistreatment of vulnerable adults, including neglect of those vulnerable adults who depend on others for care.

Abuse/neglect of vulnerable adults takes many different forms: physical, sexual, emotional, and financial. Other forms are related to giving medication improperly (e.g. to control behaviour) and taking away rights (e.g. to privacy, to make treatment decisions). Many types of abuse, and some types of neglect, are criminal offences. All types of abuse and neglect are harmful to seniors. If you are experiencing abuse or neglect, or have in the past, help is available.

Abuse and neglect encompass a wide range of behaviours. Here are some examples:

- assault, rough treatment, or inappropriate restraint failing to meet the physical needs of someone who requires care
- chronic verbal abuse that belittles or intimidates leaving a person who requires care alone for long periods of time
- stealing money or possessions, or using money for unauthorized purposes, failing to meet someone's financial needs when responsible to do so
- unwanted sexual contact or sexual harassment
- giving too much or too little medication
- making decisions for someone who is capable of making them, against the person's wishes.

While abuse and neglect are often intentional, sometimes they are not. For example, neglect may occur if a family member is caring for a vulnerable adult and is having difficulty coping.

Abuse and neglect happen to both women and men, and to vulnerable adults of different ages, abilities, cultural and economic backgrounds, and sexual orientation. Vulnerable adults may be victimized in private homes, care facilities, or public places. They may be victimized by family members or relatives, care providers, or others involved in their lives. Abuse and neglect are often related to a vulnerable adult's living and family circumstances.

For example: Physical violence may be a continuation of family violence that started some time ago, such as violence against women by their spouses. Financial abuse may be committed by adult children who are financially dependent on their parents and feel entitled to their money. Emotional abuse by family members may be associated with long-standing family problems. Abuse or neglect may occur when

seniors become dependent on others for care. Some caregivers - whether paid workers or family members - abuse the power they have over those in their care, and breach the trust placed in them.

Abuse may also occur to vulnerable adults who are in a caregiving role, such as when a senior caring for a physically dependent spouse is subjected to chronic verbal abuse. Whatever type of relationship, past or present, that a victim has with someone, **abuse or neglect is the fault of the person who commits it.**

Although victims are not responsible for others' abusive behaviour, victims of abuse or neglect often feel ashamed. Other feelings may include shock, numbness, a sense of violation, powerlessness, anxiety, fear, confusion, anger, depression, and grief. Some victims may feel alone.



*This tip sheet was compiled in partnership with Burnaby RCMP, Domestic Violence Unit.*



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Loss of trust is a key issue for many. Emotional distress may result in physical symptoms such as stomach trouble, headaches, or worsening health conditions. Physical violence can cause bruises, broken bones, and other injuries and health problems.

Financial abuse can have serious financial and legal consequences, as well as emotional and health consequences. Emotional support from others and feeling in control of one's life are important to the healing process.

Some vulnerable adults may be embarrassed to reveal abuse or neglect, particularly if a family

member is involved. They may fear retaliation from the person who harmed them. Or they may fear losing services they need, losing their money, having to move, or breaking up the family. They may worry about not being believed.

Relatives, friends, or others who suspect abuse or neglect may not want to interfere or take sides in a family matter. They may worry that further harm or worse care will result if they report abuse or neglect in a care facility. Or, they may simply not know what to do. **But help is available. See below for a list of organizations that can assist you.**

### If you are in a situation that you feel is harmful in any way, let someone know

- If you need immediate police or medical assistance, call 911 or the emergency number for your community.
- Talk to another adult you trust. If a family member or friend can provide emotional support or help you in practical ways, ask for help.
- If you feel safe and able to do so, talk to the person who is causing you harm. Let that person know how the behaviour is affecting you and ask him or her to change it.
- If the situation is not urgent but you want to report a crime, call the non-emergency number for police in your community.
- If the situation is not urgent but you may need medical care, see your doctor or go to a walk-in clinic.
- Contact victim services in your community by getting information from VictimLINK.
- Contact the Public Guardian and Trustee about financial abuse.
- Contact your Regional Health Authority about other forms of abuse or neglect of adults.
- If you have questions about abuse or neglect, or your rights, don't hesitate to ask a victim service worker.

#### **BC Centre for Elder Advocacy & Support (BCCEAS)**

Toll free in BC: 1-866-437-1940

E-mail: ceas@telus.net

#### **BC NurseLine**

Toll-free in BC: 1-866-215-4700 (24 hour service)

Hearing impaired: 1-866-889-4700

Translation services in over 130 languages on request.

#### **Crime Victim Assistance Program**

Toll-free in BC: 1-866-660-3888

E-mail: SG CrimeVictimAssistanceProgram@gov.bc.ca

#### **Public Guardian and Trustee**

Vancouver: 604-660-4444; Victoria office:

250\_356-8160; Kelowna: 250-712-7576

Outside these calling areas call Enquiry BC at

1-800-663-7867. Ask to be transferred to the

Public Guardian and Trustee

E-mail: mail@trustee.bc.ca

#### **Regional Health Authorities**

Check your phone book for the number of the

Regional Health Authority serving your community.

#### **VictimLINK**

**(Victim Services Information and Referrals)**

Toll-free in BC: 1-800-563-0808 (24 hour service)

Hearing impaired: (604) 875-0885

Outside Metro Vancouver, call collect. Multilingual.