



### 3. Speaker's notes

This section introduces you to the subject of senior abuse. It is formatted as a presentation for community groups. The material is adapted from a public education campaign that was developed by the Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women and Children at the University of Western Ontario, with funding from the Public Health Agency of Canada through the Federal Elder Abuse Initiative. The original campaign is called “It’s Not Right! Neighbours, Friends, and Families for Older Adults.” The developers have given us permission to adapt their material.

To download the slides for this presentation, go to [gov.ns.ca/seniors/stopabuse](http://gov.ns.ca/seniors/stopabuse).

If you are a community champion, do learn the ideas, but don’t feel you have to use the slides and speaking notes exactly as they appear here. For tips on getting ready for your presentation, see section 2, Tips for Community Champions.

The presentation takes about 15 minutes, not including case studies or discussion.

## "It's Not Right!"

Neighbours, Friends and Families for Older Adults

How You Can Identify Abuse and Help Older Adults at Risk



#1

"It's Not Right!" Neighbours, Friends and Families for Older Adults

### Agenda

- Welcome
- Presentation (15-20 minutes)
- Case discussions
- Wrap-up and questions
- Your feedback



#2

## About this presentation

The goal of this presentation is to teach you the warning signs of senior abuse and to show how you can reach out and offer support in safe and respectful ways. At the end of the presentation, we will practice what we have learned by reviewing some case studies and talking about warning signs and ways to help.

The presentation uses the term "abuse of older adults." The Nova Scotia Department of Seniors calls it "senior abuse." These terms mean the same thing.

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Here's the agenda we will follow.

Because of our topic, it's natural to want to share personal stories. Please treat these stories as confidential, both during this session and after. Also respect the confidential stories of people who are not here in the room.

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"It's Not Right!" Neighbours, Friends and Families for Older Adults

Everyone has the right to be **safe and free** from abuse or neglect.

We have a shared responsibility to create **safe, strong, healthy communities.**



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**People who are abused need support. People who are abusive need help.**

Neighbours, friends and family members can make a difference.



#4

## The heart of the message

A key message of this presentation is that everyone has the right to be safe and free from abuse or neglect. No one should experience abuse. **It's Not Right!**

We have a shared responsibility to promote respect for all people and to work together to create safe, strong, healthy communities.

Everyone has a role to play.

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People who are abused need support. People who are abusive need help. The bystanders—neighbours, friends, and family members—need to know what they can do to make a positive difference. Bystanders often know that abuse is happening but don't know what to do about it.

If you are the bystander, you don't have to "fix" the problem. But you can make a difference. Caring about the people around you and paying attention when there are signs of trouble are important steps. Small actions can make a big difference.

The overall strategy is to interrupt the isolation that exists in all abusive relationships.

There are two things everyone can do: **SEE it! CHECK it!** We will learn more about these steps later in the presentation and have an opportunity to practice them together.

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## What Is Abuse of Older Adults?



Harm caused to older adults by someone who *limits or controls* their rights and freedoms.

The older adults are *unable to freely make choices* because they are afraid of being hurt, humiliated, or left alone, or of the relationship ending.

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## What Is Abuse of Older Adults?



Abuse is **NOT** just impolite or rude behaviour.

It **IS** abuse when one person uses power or influence to take advantage of, or to control, the older adult.

Neglect of older adults who cannot manage on their own is also abuse.

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## What is senior abuse?

Abuse can be a hard word to accept. But recognizing abuse and naming it are essential steps toward healing it.

Different experts define abuse in different ways. For example, the Nova Scotia Elder Abuse Strategy (2005) describes senior abuse broadly as “the infliction of harm on an older person.” The strategy emphasizes that the abuse is especially harmful when it happens within a relationship where there is an expectation of trust.

This presentation focuses on **harm caused to older adults by someone who limits or controls their rights and freedoms**. The older adults are unable to freely make choices because they are afraid of being hurt, humiliated, or left alone, or afraid the relationship will end.

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Impolite behaviour or rudeness is not abuse. Arguments and conflicts are not abuse either. If both people have power in the relationship and can make choices about what happens next, then it is not necessarily an abusive situation. People may need help and support in these situations, but they are not necessarily being abused.

It is abuse when one person uses their power or influence to take advantage of, or to control, the older adult. It is also abuse when an older adult cannot manage on their own and the person responsible to care for them does not provide the necessities of life.

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## Who Are the Abusers?



Not monsters but people we know...

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## Who Are the Abusers?



Most often, abusers are family members—adult children or grandchildren.

Abusers can also be other relatives or friends, paid/unpaid caregivers, landlords, financial advisors, or anyone in a position of power, authority or trust.

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## Who are the abusers?

People who are abusive can be charming, well-liked leaders of the community in public, and very different behind closed doors. Their abusive behaviour is targeted at a specific person—the older adult. The abuse can happen infrequently or every day.

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Most situations of abuse involve family members or others who are known and trusted by the senior. Often the abusive person is an adult child or grandchild. Research shows that when adult children are abusive, it is most often a son who abuses. Family members who are accused of violence are more often men than women.

However, the abusive person might be male or female, a distant relative, a friend, a neighbour, a paid or unpaid caregiver, a landlord, a financial advisor, or any individual in a position of power, trust, or authority.

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# Understanding senior abuse

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## Why Are Some People More at Risk?

People who are abused are often isolated.



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## There Are Other Risk Factors Too...



There are a number of factors that increase the risk of abuse. Isolation is often a factor. Everyone in and around an abusive relationship can feel isolated.

As bystanders, we can feel isolated, unsure about what to do, and afraid of making a mistake. We may feel alone with our fears and concerns.

For the people caught in an abusive relationship, as the violence escalates—which it often does—the isolation becomes deeper and more profound.

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Other risk factors include:

- a history of family violence
- shared living arrangements—for example, when an older adult lives with a caregiver or a friend
- addictions, such as drugs, alcohol, or gambling—involving the abused or the abuser
- dependency on the older adult for shelter or financial help
- depression and other mental health issues—in the abused or the abuser
- cognitive impairment—confusion, memory loss, or dementia—in the abused or the abuser

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## Emotional Abuse



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## Violation of Rights and Freedoms



## Emotional abuse

It is emotional abuse if somebody threatens, insults, intimidates, or humiliates an older adult, treats the person like a child, or does not allow them to see their family and friends.

It is a mistake to think that if there is no physical violence, there is no abuse. People who experience emotional abuse will tell you that having someone yell at you and tell you that you are worthless can be just as devastating as being punched or kicked.

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## Violation of rights and freedoms

It is abuse when somebody prevents an older adult from enjoying the rights and freedoms normally available to adults. This may include a wide range of unlawful or unreasonable violations, such as:

- interfering with spiritual practices, customs, or traditions
- withholding information
- preventing visitors
- opening, tampering, or redirecting mail
- keeping someone in a hospital or institution without a legitimate reason

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## Physical Abuse

It is abuse if you hit me or handle me roughly—even if there is no injury.

A threat to hurt me is also abuse.



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## Physical abuse

It is physical abuse if somebody hits an older adult or handles the person roughly, even if there is no injury. Giving a person too much or too little medication, or physically restraining a person, are also forms of physical abuse.

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## Warning Signs

I become depressed and withdrawn or fearful.

Signs of neglect such as no food in the house.

My phone is cut off, or things start disappearing from my house.

If I tell you I am being abused—believe me.

I stop attending social events or church.

Someone suddenly moves in with me.

I have injuries I can't explain

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## Warning signs

If an older adult tells you they are being abused, believe them!

Some warning signs might be big and disturbing, like physical injuries. Other warning signs might be harder to read—for example, when an older adult becomes anxious or withdrawn, or stops visiting with friends. The booklet *Understanding Senior Abuse: Facts, Tips, Contacts* includes some signs and symptoms to watch for.

It can be tempting to ignore warning signs and tell yourself that you must be mistaken or that it's not that bad because it's "only" one warning sign. Remember that a warning sign is like seeing the tip of an iceberg. There is likely much more going on below the surface.

Trust your instincts when something makes you feel uncomfortable. But don't jump to conclusions.

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## Two Things Everyone Can Do



### 1. SEE it! "It's not right!"

- Learn about abuse
- Recognize the warning signs
- Overcome your hesitation to help



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## Two Things Everyone Can Do



### 2. CHECK it!

"Is it abuse? What can I do to help?"

- Ask questions
- Check with a professional
- Check for danger
- Suggest safety planning



#26

## 1. SEE it!

Pay attention when something makes you uncomfortable. Learn the warning signs so that you can say, **"It's not right!"**

Overcome your hesitation. You may feel uncertain about becoming involved. That's understandable, but it's not the end of the story. Remember that abuse causes great harm and suffering and will not go away without help. It's everyone's business.

If you need support or guidance, you can talk to someone you trust about what to do next. You can also talk to a professional, a service provider, or a trusted friend.

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## 2. CHECK it!

Don't jump to conclusions. A warning sign does not automatically mean that abuse is happening. Check it out.

Before you take any action, stop and ask yourself:

- What are the safety issues?
- Am I being respectful to the older adult?

Your next step will depend on the situation.

If the situation is dangerous, don't hesitate. Call the police or 911. Trust your instincts. It is always better to be safe than sorry.

If the situation is not dangerous, asking questions is the best way to find out if abuse is happening. If possible, talk privately with the person you are concerned about.

If you are uncertain about what to do, check with the Senior Abuse Information and Referral Line (1-877-833-3377), or with local professionals.

They may be able to point you to resources in the community, and may advise you about safety planning.

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### How to Talk to the Older Adult

**Find a time** when the abusive person is not present.

**Describe** what you heard or saw—stick to the facts.

**Listen** carefully—ask how you can help.

**Respect** if he/she doesn't want to talk about it—leave the door open.



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### Finding Help

Emergencies: **911**

Senior Abuse Information and Referral Line:  
**1-877-833-3377**

Adult Protection: **1-800-225-7225**

Legal information: **1-800-665-9779**  
(455-3135 in Halifax)

Other help lines and websites

Your neighbours, friends, and family members

#28

If it is safe, talk to the person who you think is being abused. Remember these tips:

- Wait for a time when you are alone and not likely to be interrupted.
- Describe what you saw and heard. Stick to the facts.
- Ask caring questions. *Are you okay? Is someone hurting you? What do you want to do? How can I help?*
- Be supportive and listen. Let them know that whatever is happening is not their fault.
- Encourage them to be their own advocate. Support them to make their own informed decisions.
- Respect their decisions, even when you don't agree. If you are concerned that they are unable to make informed decisions, ask for advice from a professional.
- Be patient. Leave the door open.

For more information, see the booklet ***Understanding Senior Abuse: Facts, Tips, Contacts.***

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## How to find help

Whoever you are—a concerned bystander, an overwhelmed caregiver, or a person experiencing abuse—it is important that you find help and that you feel supported. There are many ways to find help.

If you make a phone call and the line is no longer in service, or if you reach someone who isn't helpful, don't give up. Try again. Try another number. Look for someone else to talk to. Only you can decide what really helps and what kind of support feels right. You shouldn't feel pressured by anyone to do something you aren't ready or willing to do.

These contacts and others are in the booklet ***Understanding Senior Abuse: Facts, Tips, Contacts.***

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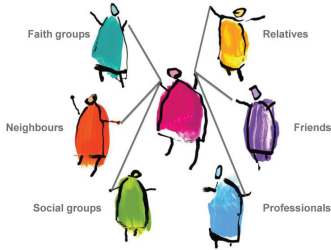
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## Circles of Care

Stay connected. Work together.



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Try it now...

1. SEE it!
2. CHECK it!



#30

## Circles of care

Change happens in everyday ways. It starts with a circle of care—people who support and care for each other.

Remember, you don't have to be a hero or fix the situation for another person. Little things count—like sharing this message. Talk about senior abuse and healthy ways to respond. Know about resources in your community. Stay connected, and help others to be connected.

Together we can build safer, more respectful communities.

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## Practising with case studies

Let's learn more and talk about this issue. Look at the case studies and practice the two steps: **SEE it!** and **CHECK it!**

*[Choose from the Quick Studies or from the six longer cases in this toolkit.]*

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