



The Ontario Network  
for the Prevention of Elder Abuse

# BASIC INTRODUCTION TO THE THE ABUSE OF OLDER ADULTS

A Guide for Presenters of Abuse of Older Adult Workshops



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## **Table of Contents**

### **Please Note :**

Page numbers are not included in the following Table of Contents due to the fact that this Guide can be expanded upon. This Table of Contents lists chronologically the sections included in the Guide as it is being provided to you.

Preface

Rationale

Background Research

Users of the Guide

Purpose

How to Use this Guide

Handling Disclosures of Abuse

Philosophy and Guiding Principles

Recommendations

Two Guide Formats

Examples of When the 1 Hour Presentation may be Expanded Upon

Appendix # 1 – “Guidelines for Adult Education”

Appendix # 2 – The “Rights of Older Adults”

Appendix # 3 - Changing Community Attitudes and Values

Appendix # 4 – Myths Regarding the Abuse of Older Adults

Appendix # 5 – Personal and Professional Values of Service Providers

Appendix # 6 – Ethical Considerations

Appendix # 7 – Diversity

Appendix # 8 – Presentation Checklist

Appendix # 9 – Participant Evaluation Form

Appendix # 10 – Evaluation Form: Guide

## **Preface**

This Guide provides basic introductory information regarding building community awareness about the abuse and neglect of older adults (which has also been referred to as “elder abuse”).

During consultations with community groups and networks across the Province a need was expressed for a basic, user-friendly presentation that would increase community awareness about the issue(s) of the abuse of older adults.

## **Rationale**

Presently there is no one community agency devoted exclusively to addressing the abuse of older adults and providing education regarding understanding, preventing and responding to abuse. Community groups have identified a lack of available, consistent, educational materials that can be used in their communities. Local service provider agencies also, often lack the time, expertise and resources required to produce this type of material. In response to this identified need the Ontario Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse and the Regional Consultants of Ontario’s Strategy to Combat Elder Abuse developed a basic, user-friendly presentation for use by professionals and/or volunteers.

## **Background Research**

A comprehensive literature review was conducted on current best practices from multiple sectors including justice, health, community, academic research, etc. For a detailed bibliography and literature review please see the ONPEA Web site ([www.onpea.org](http://www.onpea.org)) or contact the ONPEA office for a hard copy of these materials.

## **Users of the Guide**

This Guide was developed for use by:

Community groups

Older adults

The general public

Frontline service providers

Gatekeepers (people with visible positions in the community who interact with seniors on a regular basis such as: pharmacists, hairdressers, employees of financial institutions, postal workers, etc.)

To maximize the benefit of this Guide, it is expected that presenters will have a basic understanding of the issue(s) of the abuse of older adults, that they will be connected in some way to their local network/committee against abuse of older persons (if one exists), and/or that they will collaborate with a recognized community service provider in the presentation of this material.

For a listing of local abuse of older adult networks/committees please refer to the ONPEA website at [www.onpea.org](http://www.onpea.org) or contact ONPEA by phone (416-640-7784).

## **Purpose**

- To increase awareness of the abuse of older adults
- To introduce the abuse of older adults as a social/health problem
- To educate in regards to the signs and symptoms of the abuse of older adults
- To provide a general understanding of how to respond to and support someone who is being abused
- To provide a template for introductory presentation/learning about the abuse of older adults

## **How to Use this Guide**

This Guide was developed so that presenters could expand upon the information contained within by adding materials relevant to their audience and sensitive to the needs of their community.

## **Handling Disclosures of Abuse**

The facilitator of a presentation on the abuse of older adults should always begin the presentation by reminding participants that, due to the need to respect confidentiality, specific details regarding an incident(s) of abuse of an older adult cannot be discussed. Despite this caution, the sensitive nature of the subject matter being presented is sometimes viewed by participants as an opportunity to either a) ask general questions during the presentation about an incident of abuse about which they are concerned or b) to speak individually to the facilitator after the presentation about a specific incident. It is, therefore suggested that the facilitator be prepared to address such disclosures and be knowledgeable about local community resources in order to assist the concerned participant and/or the abused older adult being discussed

The following list provides examples of ways to prepare for a disclosure of abuse: (Adapted from: the "*Resource and Training Kit for Service Providers*"; Murphy; 1994; p 5)

1. When possible have a second presenter/support person available during the presentation to take participants aside should they wish to talk
2. Compile and hand out a list of local community resources and contact numbers and
3. Give participants time to talk about their concern(s) after each presentation in one-on-one informal discussions

## **Philosophy & Guiding Principles**

Abuse of older adults is hard to talk about and evokes strong emotions. Sometimes well-meaning people who are attempting to assist an abused older adult tell the older adult what they “should” do and/or act on behalf of the older adult in a manner that is against the person’s wishes.

You cannot talk about this issue without acknowledging the rights of capable older adults and their right to self-determination. It is the older adult who must direct the nature of any interaction.

It is therefore important to begin any presentation with both the discussion regarding confidentiality (referred to in the “Handling Disclosures of Abuse” section above) and a discussion of the basic rights that we are all guaranteed under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and Provincial Legislation. This Guide promotes a philosophy based on human rights. (Please see the United Nations Principles for Older Persons and the Toronto Declaration on the Global Prevention of Elder Abuse in Appendix 2 of this Guide.)

This Guide is based upon the presumption that the older adult is capable and has the capacity to make decisions for himself or herself.

## **Recommendations**

Please see the “*Guidelines for Adult Education*” in Appendix 1 of this Guide.

### **Two Guide Formats**

This Guide incorporates:

- a 30 minute Power Point presentation, and
- a 1 hour Power Point presentation that can be expanded upon (whereby you choose from a menu of related materials and customize the content for your audience)

The purpose of the 30 minute presentation is to increase “basic” awareness of the abuse of older adults and the signs and symptoms of abuse.

The 1 hour presentation is designed to increase awareness of the abuse of older adults and to further build upon this knowledge.

Those who facilitate the 1 hour presentation are expected to be **thoroughly** knowledgeable about the facts concerning the abuse of older adults and **fully** aware of available community resources.

### **Examples of When the 1 Hour Presentation may be Expanded Upon**

Expanded presentations may be developed for use by local service provider agency representatives in order to expand knowledge in their particular sector and/or (where local abuse of older adult networks/committees exist) for use by network/committee members in order to expand the knowledge of network/committee members.

## Appendix # 1

(The following is taken from: Resource and Training Kit for Service Providers: Abuse and Neglect of Older Adults.; Murphy, N.; 1994; p 5)

### Guidelines for Adult Education

All group participants bring unique perspectives to discussions because of different personal, family and community histories. *The challenge is to encourage everyone to examine his or her potential role in preventing abuse and neglect of older adults.* The following key points in conducting workshops will encourage participants to join the discussion.

- Use material as a vehicle for engaging participants in discussions of their own experiences and ideas. Present information in point form, using overheads and flip charts. Promote active participation by having small discussion groups with specific time-limited tasks.
- Choose topics that are useful and relevant to the group and encourage participants to relate the material to their own work or community roles. For instance, seniors' groups may be interested in how to maintain independence, how to recognize indicators of abuse or neglect and how to do peer counseling. Service providers may wish to examine their roles in assessment or intervention.
- Conduct workshops democratically. Because the objective is to raise awareness about the value of older adults as individuals deserving respect, start by showing respect for workshop participants. Avoid professional jargon. If the group asks questions, they are more actively involved. Learning from peers and experiential learning are the most effective ways of changing attitudes.
- A democratic approach does not mean letting the group wander or letting the most talkative participant take over. Ensure that less vocal participants get a chance to contribute. Once the group has agreed to objectives and a timetable, remain on topic and on schedule.

- Give participants an opportunity to choose how to approach the topic. Although it is important to provide the background material in the introductory section, begin the workshop by emphasizing flexibility. Find out what the group wants to know about the topic. **Create a non-judgmental, comfortable environment for participants. At the beginning of each workshop, discuss the issue of confidentiality. Information of a personal or professional nature concerning the participants, or people they know, should not be discussed during the workshop or with others outside of the workshop.**
- Be supportive. Emphasize that abuse and neglect is an emotional issue, and that it is understandable if participants are affected by material.

## **Appendix # 2**

(The following is taken from: Home Support Canada, 1993 & McGregor, 1995)

### **The Rights of Older Adults**

#### **Older Adults have the right to:**

- basic requirements of life, such as food, clothing, and shelter
- live free from physical, sexual, psychological, financial, sexual and medication abuse, violation of civil/human rights and neglect
- be informed about their civil and legal rights
- self-determination
- live as they wish, provided they do not infringe upon the rights and safety of others
- participate in making decisions about themselves, to the full extent of their capability
- refuse assistance and intervention

#### **Please Also See:**

United Nations Principles for Older Persons  
<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/iyop/iyoppop.htm>

Toronto Declaration on the Global Prevention of Elder Abuse  
<http://www.who.int/hpr/ageing/TorontoDeclarationEnglish.pdf>

## **Appendix # 3**

(The following is taken from: Alberta Office for the Prevention of Family Violence; Revised; 1982)

### **Changing Community Attitudes and Values**

Attitudes and values play a large role in how a community responds to the issue of the abuse and neglect of older adults. Before attitudes or values can change, we must first acknowledge that abuse and neglect are occurring in both domestic and institutional settings in our communities. We must also accept that the issue is extremely complex and that there is no “quick fix” to empower individuals or to change ageist attitudes and violent behaviour. We must also understand that there are no simple solutions or “right” approaches to address the issue.

Our society holds many negative attitudes toward older people and aging. Prejudice toward older adults is termed “ageism”. Older adults do not generally have a prominent, respected position in Western society. As people age, they are often considered inferior and useless.

Our society is obsessed with being young, attractive and active. Many people do not acknowledge their own aging and this is reflected in the way they deal with older adults. To some extent we all reflect society’s attitudes, including negative attitudes towards old age. People must come to terms with their personal fear of aging if stereotypes of older adults are to change.

Ageist attitudes have a very negative effect on the health and psychological well-being of older people and can encourage abuse and neglect. Ageist attitudes and a general acceptance of the use of violence to punish and control family members can weaken inhibitions against abuse and neglect. Moreover, the abuse and neglect of older adults may be wrongly regarded as less serious than when it happens to children or young wives.

## **Appendix # 4**

(The following is adapted from: *Community Awareness and Response: Abuse and Neglect of Older Adults*, National Clearinghouse on Family Violence; Reprinted 1993; pp 40 -41)

### **Myths Regarding the Abuse of Older Adults**

There are many attitudes towards older adults which contribute to their victimization by family, friends and other persons in positions of trust. These attitudes find expression in myths about aging and family violence. Communities have to challenge ageism and myths of abuse to change how the issue is perceived. Some common myths are listed here.

#### **Myth #1 Older victims are somehow responsible for their abuse or neglect.**

No one ever deserves to be abused or neglected. Responsibility for abuse or neglect rests solely with the abuser. Placing too much emphasis on “caregiver stress” as a contributing factor tends to “forgive” the abuser and promote victim-blaming (Tomita, 1990). More attention needs to be focused on the characteristics of abusers rather than the victims.

#### **Myth # 2 Older people are “burdens” or an inconvenience to their families.**

Although some older people depend on their families for certain kinds of support, in many cases the relationship is one of mutual assistance between generations. For example, a daughter may pick up groceries for her parents but she may regularly eat supper at their home. In many families there is a mutual dependency which does not lead to abuse and neglect (Pillemer, 1990).

#### **Myth # 3 Abuse of one’s partner stops at age 60.**

Until recently there has been little recognition of the continuation of partner abuse as couples age. This may be another reflection of ageism in our society and it may also be due to the fact that there are not many statistics available regarding the prevalence of partner abuse among older couples. Some of the reasons for the lack of statistics in this regard may be that police services do not record the ages of the perpetrators or abused when they record responses to “domestic” situations. Women’s Shelters have traditionally provided services to mainly younger women and their children. Pillmer (1990) suggests that the lack of recognition may also have resulted from an attempt to capture the public’s attention by using more powerful images of younger people abusing older adults. This may be the same reason why abuse among older siblings is not often discussed.

**Myth # 4 Older men are not abused by their spouse and/or children.**

Men also experience abuse. They may have a more difficult time disclosing abuse because of a prevalent societal belief that being victimized is shameful and inconsistent with the masculine role. Family violence affects both women and men.

**Myth # 5 Certain cultural communities are immune to abuse and neglect.**

People of all cultural heritages, races and religions encounter the problem of abuse and neglect of older adults. Several stereotypes of cultures and family violence exist. For example, many people believe that because a culture may emphasize respect for its older members, abuse and neglect do not occur within their community. Unfortunately, this is not the case (Toronto Mayor's Committee on Aging, 1989). Abuse and neglect of older people occurs in every community.

## **Appendix # 5**

(The following is taken from: *Community Awareness and Response: Abuse and Neglect of Older Adults*, National Clearinghouse on Family Violence; Reprinted 1993; pp 40 -41)

### **Personal and Professional Values of Service Providers**

Negative attitudes and myths about older people and family violence can shape service providers' personal and professional values (Bookin & Dunkle, 1985). Service providers can hold negative views of older people. They can sometimes blame an older person's "difficult personality" or "dependency" for abuse or neglect (Shell, 1982).

Service providers also have varying tolerance levels for family violence. They assess abusive and neglectful situations in light of their own personal values. Ultimately, service delivery reflects their values. For example, a supervisor wondered why a service provider did not consider an adult daughter striking her mother with a hairbrush as abusive behaviour, until she saw how the service provider acted towards her own young daughter (Bookin & Dunkle, 1985). Individuals must recognize their personal values toward aging and family violence and reflect on how these values influence their delivery of professional services.

## **Appendix # 6**

### **Ethical Considerations**

Abuse of vulnerable individuals, which includes older adults, has long presented particularly difficult issues for our society. The obligation of society to the increasing number and proportion of older adults in the population are reflected in various attempts to protect the rights and welfare of people experiencing some form of abuse.

Ethics are standards of conduct that guide decisions and actions which are based on duties derived from a set of core values such as professional guidelines. Occasionally, predicaments arise when there is no clear “best answer” that fits the situation neatly within those standards. At such times, we are faced with ethical dilemmas of competing values in choosing a course of action. It is essential that, in those circumstances, we are mindful of our personal/professional values and the values of the organization that we represent.

By honouring the person’s right to self-determination and by attending to the principles of “least intrusive/least restrictive” action, plans can be created that are supportive of the individual’s wishes.

## **Appendix # 7**

### **Diversity**

Those who interact with older adults must be sensitive to factors of race, ethnicity, culture, alternative lifestyles and disability. These factors might influence how the older adult is viewed and treated. It is important for service providers and others to clearly understand the expectations and values that the older adult holds with respect to living arrangements, power structure, family supports and the use of health/social services. Service providers need to be aware of their own values and biases in order to ensure that these are not unconsciously projected onto the older adult.

Key questions to consider might include:

- What role does the older adult hold within their household structure?
- What are the roles of the other members in the household?
- If care is necessary, who is expected to provide it?
- Does the household view these actions/behaviours as abusive?
- Who makes decisions about household financial resources?
- How can older adults with limited mobility, or limited English, access information and/or resources?

For more information about diversity please refer to the ONPEA website [www.onpea.org](http://www.onpea.org)

## Appendix # 8

### Presentation Checklist

#### Type of Presentation:

Expanded: \_\_\_\_\_

1 hour: \_\_\_\_\_

30 min.: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Presentation Details:

Presentation Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_  
Confirmed?: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Remember to:

- ✓ allow time to set up & greet participants
- ✓ confirm 24-48 hours prior to giving presentation

Contact Person: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Presenting To (group/audience): \_\_\_\_\_

Address of Location of Presentation: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\*provide directions on back of this form, including nearest cross street

#### Remember to:

- ✓ Check the size of the presentation room and the seating arrangements – provide details on back

Number of Expected Participants: \_\_\_\_\_

Participants Speak: English \_\_\_\_\_ French \_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Supplies required:**

- ✓ Presentation package (Overheads or Power Point presentation)
- ✓ Overheads projected onto: screen \_\_\_\_\_ wall (colour?) \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ LCD Projector: Inquire if available on premises Projector required? \_\_\_\_\_  
Laptop required? \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ Handouts: (pamphlets, brochures, educational supplements)  
Number of handouts required? \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ Video (if using) \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ TV/VCR: inquire if available on premises TV/VCR Required? \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ Copies of case scenarios (if using) \_\_\_\_\_

**ALWAYS BE PREPARED  
YOUR TRAVEL KIT SHOULD INCLUDE:**

- ✓ Extension cord
- ✓ Masking tape
- ✓ Black marker/markers
- ✓ A hard copy of your presentation

**Comments:**

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**Housekeeping details**

When you begin your presentation remember to provide participants with facility information (washroom locations etc.)

\* If the presentation is 1 hour in length or longer inquire about the availability of refreshments & expected break time(s)

## Appendix # 9

### Participant Evaluation Form

Your responses are important to us so that we can continually increase the effectiveness of these presentations.

Please take a few minutes to respond to the following questions.

**Please indicate: 1 (poor) 5 (excellent)**

1. This presentation has increased my awareness of the issues of abuse of older adults

1 2 3 4 5

2. I now know who to call if abuse is suspected

1 2 3 4 5

3. The presentation was clear and provided useful information

1 2 3 4 5

Comments:

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**Thank you!**

## Appendix # 10

### Evaluation Form

#### Basic Introduction to the Abuse of Older Adults A Guide for Presenters of Abuse of Older Adult Workshops

We would like to know whether you found this Guide helpful and we would appreciate it if you could take a few moments to answer the following questions.

**Please print out this Form and mail your responses to:**

**ONPEA  
800 Bay Street  
7<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Toronto, Ontario M5S 3A9**

1. Please identify your professional background : \_\_\_\_\_
2. What experience have you had working in this area, i.e. abuse of older adults?  
  
Less than 1 year \_\_\_\_\_ 1-5 years \_\_\_\_\_ >5 years \_\_\_\_\_
3. Please check one of the following that best describes your role:  
  
Health \_\_\_\_\_ Justice \_\_\_\_\_ Community Agency \_\_\_\_\_  
Faith Organization \_\_\_\_\_ Volunteer \_\_\_\_\_  
Long-Term Care \_\_\_\_\_ Retirement/Care Home \_\_\_\_\_  
Other (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_
4. Are you connected with a local network/committee on the abuse of older adults? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_  
  
If yes, please name. \_\_\_\_\_
5. How often have you used this resource?  
  
Not at all \_\_\_\_\_ 1-5 times \_\_\_\_\_ > 5 times \_\_\_\_\_

6. Have you found it to be useful? Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_

Please comment: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. Are there any changes/additions to these materials you would recommend?

Please elaborate: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. What questions arose during your presentation(s) that were not addressed within these materials?

9. General Comments

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**Thank you!**