

Elder Abuse Awareness

Understanding Elder Abuse and What you can do to
Support Neighbours, Friends & Family



PEI Women's Institute Convener Kit
April 2012

Elder Abuse Awareness Kit

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Using this Kit

Thank you for your interest in raising awareness of elder abuse with local Institute members. As you will learn, the abuse of older adults affects many Island communities - our neighbours, friends and families. This is also a sensitive issue for many people who may be reluctant to take action or start a conversation about elder abuse. Learning how to recognize possible signs of elder abuse, how to help and where to go for help in communities are all important steps for Islanders who believe in building safe Island communities.

Getting started.....

You can use this kit to start a group discussion by reading Noreen's story. Here are some discussion points to start your conversation:

- *What type(s) of elder abuse was Noreen experiencing?*
- *If you were Noreen what would you do next?*
- *If you were a friend of Noreen what might you advise her to do?*

You can also start a discussion by taking the quiz and reviewing the answers to quiz as a group. Here are some discussion points:

- *Does it surprise you that most people know the person that being abusive towards them?*
- *Why do you think some people might be reluctant to report elder abuse?*
- *Where might you turn for help if you suspected someone was being abused?*

Present the 'facts on elder abuse' and ask members if they know some signs of possible abuse.

Discuss some of the barriers to taking action and resources that are available in your local community. You may also wish to invite a special speaker to your meeting, such as the RCMP or Adult Protection.

Noreen's Story

Noreen walked into the kitchen for another cup of tea. It was a quiet Sunday afternoon and she wondered if her son Bill, his wife Susan and their son Johnny would come over for a visit. Noreen had been worried about Bill for the past six months since the fishing season had gone poorly. Bill was looking for extra work but so far had no luck finding another job. Susan was also getting fewer hours of work at the store. The family was serious trouble.

Noreen had been feeling lonely in the old family home since her husband Jim's death. Jim had taken care of fixing up things around the home, paid the bills and driven to town at least every couple of weeks for shopping and to do errands. Noreen appreciated Bill's willingness to take her to town at least once a month for grocery shopping and banking. Bill would drive her to town, wait for her to go to the bank to pay bills and withdraw some spending money and then take her to the grocery store. Three months ago Bill had offered to run the errands for her and take care of paying bills to save Noreen the bother and stress of the trip. It seemed like a good arrangement and so Noreen gave Bill her debit card and password so he could begin taking care of the payments.

It took a couple of months to realize that Bill had been buying the groceries and making needed payments but he had also been pocketing extra money for himself. Noreen was shocked last week when a cheque that she had written to cover her life insurance had bounced. She knew Bill was having some financial problems but hadn't realized that these were so serious that he would take her money.

When Noreen had mentioned the missing money to Bill he had become irritated and blamed the bank for making a 'stupid mistake'. He had also commented that if Noreen didn't trust him to do her banking that she could find someone else to do it. Since then neither Bill nor Susan had called. Noreen was also looking forward to seeing young Johnny but unless Bill or Susan came over for a visit Noreen wouldn't be able to see her grandson.

Facts on Elder Abuse

What is elder abuse?

Elder abuse is any action or inaction by a person that causes harm or threatens to cause harm to an older adult. In 2002, the World Health Organization described elder abuse as:

“A single, or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust that causes harm or distress to an older person.”

Is there more than one type of elder abuse?

The abuse of older adults may take many forms including:

- **Physical abuse** – kicking, shoving, hitting, forcible confinement, withholding or under medicating
- **Neglect (self neglect or neglect by another person)** – abandoning an older adult, failing to provide necessary services, food or shelter
- **Financial abuse** – theft, dishonest use of money or assets, forgery, fraud, misuse of a Power of Attorney
- **Emotional and verbal abuse**
- **Sexual abuse** – sexual assault, unwanted sexual contact

What are the most common types of elder abuse on PEI?

On PEI the most common types of elder abuse referred to Adult Protection services are: self neglect, caregiver neglect, financial abuse, and emotional/verbal abuse.

Did you know?

On PEI 75% of the referrals to Adult Protection are for people over age 65

Why does the abuse of older adults happen?

There is no single cause of the abuse of older adults. It may occur in relation to a single event or combination of life events such as physical or mental health illness, retirement, employment or family difficulties, addiction, or a dispute. It can affect older adults of any background, culture, religion and economic status. Research suggests that there are some factors that may increase the risk of elder abuse including:

- Lack of understanding that certain behaviors are wrong and are abusive
- Negative attitudes about aging leading to disrespectful and abusive actions

- Beliefs about the role and expectations of women and men
- Lack of understanding of the needs and abilities of older adults
- Longstanding pattern of existing abuse and violence in a family or relationship
- Lack of awareness of the responsibilities of care giving and limited access to support services

These, and other factors can increase the risk of the abuse of older adults.

Who are the abusers?

Older adults most often know their abusers. A child, spouse, relative, care giver, friend, neighbor or service provider may be abusive. The relationship between the abuser and the older adult can be a barrier to a senior getting help for a number of reasons:

- the abuser may have control or influence over the older adult
- the older adult may be afraid that they will be forced to move to an institution
- there may be guilt, shame or embarrassment that a family member would behave in such a manner
- fear of repercussions by the abuser

An older adult may also be uncertain about where to turn for help. But help is available.

What are some of the signs of elder abuse?

Someone who is being abused may:

- be in denial
- blame themselves or make excuses for the abuser
- have limited access to friends, family or resources (such as money, phone)
- try to cover bruises
- be fearful or withdrawn
- be uncomfortable or nervous around a particular person
- seem depressed, sad or increasingly isolated
- seem defensive and angry
- cope by using drugs or alcohol

Someone who is being abusive may:

- put the other person down, do all the talking or dominate conversation

- try to keep the person away from family and friends
- check up on the person frequently
- hit, slap, verbally or sexually abuse another person
- make threats
- be jealous or suspicious
- have little regard for the law

What can I do to help if I suspect that a neighbour, friend or family member is experiencing abuse?

- **Reach out** to the older adult and ask privately about the abuse
- Let the person know that you are willing to **listen**
- **Support** the person to think about their options
- **Provide information** and **encourage** the older adult to seek community help



Community Awareness Ideas

There are many ways that you can get involved and raise awareness of the issue of elder abuse and help to prevent it in your community. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- Recognize World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (June 15th) with a barbeque or afternoon tea. Invite an Adult Protection worker to present during the event.
- Create an information display at your town hall, shopping mall, grocery store or church.
- Ask your mayor or town council to proclaim June 15th as World Elder Abuse Awareness Day.
- Learn more about financial abuse and how you can protect yourself from identify theft.
- Ask Women's Institute members to wear purple clothing at a meeting to remember victims of violence.
- Host a contest with a local school and ask students to create a poster on the abuse of older adults.



Elder Abuse Awareness Quiz

True or False?

1. Most older people who experience abuse do not know their abuser.
True or False?
2. The abuse of older adults is often reported to police.
True or False?
3. Elder abuse can happen to anyone.
True or False?
4. It's none of my business.
True or False?
5. In the case of abuse of an older adult it is best to wait until the senior asks for help.
True or False?



Elder Abuse Awareness Quiz – Answer Key

1. **False.** People who commit abuse against older adults are most often someone who the older adult knows – a child, husband or wife, brother or sister, other relative, friend, neighbour or paid caregiver.
2. **False.** Elder abuse is an under-reported problem. Though one in five Canadians believe that they know an older adult who may be experiencing abuse far fewer seniors report elder abuse and seek help.
3. **True.** Abuse can happen to anyone in any family or relationship. It can happen to people of any age, social background, culture or religion.
4. **False.** Elder abuse harms communities, families and individuals. In many cases it is against the law. The abuse of older adults is everyone's business. By taking action you can let an older adult know that someone cares and is there to help.
5. **False.** An older adult may be too afraid or ashamed to ask for help, by starting the conversation you can let them know that someone is there to help.



Community Resource List

There are resources in the community to help you and a person who may be experiencing abuse.

In an emergency, call 911.

PEI Family Violence Prevention Services

Anderson House: 1-800-240-9894
West Prince Outreach: 859-8849
East Prince Outreach: 436-0517
Eastern PEI Outreach: 838-0795
Queens Outreach: 894-3354 ext. 224

Chief Mary Bernard Memorial Women's Shelter: 831-2332

Lennox Island Family Violence Prevention Program: 831-2711

PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre: 1-800-289-5656

Victim Services

Charlottetown: 368-4582
Summerside: 888-8217

Community Legal Information Association and Lawyer Referral Service: 1-800-240-9798

Adult Protection Services

Charlottetown: 368-4790
Montague: 838-0786
O'Leary: 859-8730
Souris: 687-7096
Summerside: 888-8440

PEI Senior Safety Program

Eastern coordinator: 393-7400
Western coordinator: 439-7000



Start the Conversation

A video resource and discussion guide designed to help neighbours, friends and family members learn how to begin the discussion with people who are experiencing an abusive relationship.

This video is available from PEI public libraries or at the link below.

http://justiceoptions.ca/safetycircles/content/page/front_startingtheconversation

A story of elder abuse

Elder abuse is your business! What are you going to do about it?

This short video presents the story of a woman, living with a grown son, who is experiencing financial abuse.

<http://www.albertaelderabuse.ca/trainingVid.html>

Speakers for your meeting

Your local World Elder Abuse Awareness Committee is here to help, if you would like to arrange for a speaker to present information on elder abuse awareness and prevention at your meeting call 1-866-770-0588 or contact seniors@gov.pe.ca

Tell us what you think....

The World Elder Abuse Awareness Day Committee is interested in your ideas on raising awareness of the issue of elder abuse in the community.

1. What did you like most about this kit?
2. What did you like least about this kit?
3. What topics would you like more information about?

Please return this form to the WI office

or

Fax back to: 894-0242

or

Email: seniors@gov.pe.ca



Thank you!

ADULT PROTECTION SERVICES

Unfortunately any person can become vulnerable to abuse - it affects all socio-economic and cultural groups, in rural and urban settings, and can occur in institutions as well as in private homes.

The mandate of Adult Protection Services is to protect vulnerable adults who are unable to protect themselves from abuse and neglect. Vulnerability can include: a head injury, intellectual disability, or a dementia such as Alzheimers.

In 2010, 134 vulnerable adults were referred to Adult Protection. The reasons for referral were as follows:

- Self-Neglect 41%
- Caregiver Neglect 20%
- Financial Abuse 19%
- Emotional/ Verbal Abuse 15%
- Physical Abuse 4%
- Sexual Abuse 1%

The perpetrators were children, spouses, parents, siblings, and other relatives as well as friends, neighbors, paid caregivers, staff in facilities, hospitals and group homes. Perpetrators are the people we know, trust, and care for us.

Risk factors can include:

- Cognitive impairment
- Poor health and functional ability
- Social Isolation
- Shared living arrangement
- Dependence on caregiver

If you believe a vulnerable adult is at risk you can make a confidential referral to any Health PEI Home Care office at the following:

Souris	687-7096
Montague	838-0786
Charlottetown	368-4790
Summerside	888-8440
O'Leary	859-8730

