



PERCEPTIONS OF ABUSE

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

The Perceptions Of Abuse Project

Perceptions of Abuse, a case study of elder abuse, as seen through the eyes of adolescents, provides powerful stimulus for discussion. The video creates awareness of abuse and neglect of older people and encourages the idea of prevention through education.

The accompanying package of resource materials serves to guide and direct discussion following the viewing of the video. The group leader may choose from a variety of thought provoking questions depending upon the age and composition of the group and the desired outcome. Given the complexity of this issue background information on Elder Abuse has been provided . It is further suggested that the group leader focus on an anticipated learning outcome before initiating the group discussion.

Use of the video and resource material will:

- *Generate awareness and understanding of the issue of neglect and abuse of older people*
- *Encourage elders and future elders to protect themselves and their peers from all forms of abuse*
- *Help caregivers to recognize the potential to curb incidents of elder abuse before they begin*
- *Promote the belief that every age group has a part to play in the identification and resolution of abusive situations*

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Using the Video

1. Preview the video and become familiar with its content.
2. Review the facilitator's guide for the specific group or groups you will be involved with.
3. Develop a clear idea of the reasons you have chosen to use this learning tool with your group.
4. Describe in point form your desired learning outcomes. Your facilitator's guide will assist you with some aspects found to be of value to similar age groups.
5. Plan for a generous amount of time for discussion. One half an hour for each learning outcome is suggested.
6. Give the group as much advance notice of the first showing as possible. This allows participants to mentally prepare themselves for the topic and may prompt prior research and reading in the area.
7. To familiarize the viewers with the essence of the problem you may wish to provide them with a copy of the basic background information included in these printed materials.
8. Plan your introduction carefully to naturally guide the attention of the viewers toward the desired learning outcomes.
9. To gain an understanding of your group's "pre-viewing" attitudes and knowledge of elder abuse, you may wish to begin with several open ended questions.
10. It may be necessary to plan for more than one discussion session. Always begin each follow-up session with at least an excerpt from the video to provide a catalyst for discussion.

As a group leader it is important to note that this material may evoke an emotional response in some members of your audience. Elder abuse is a sensitive issue! The opinions and perceptions shared by the people in the video are both personal and thought provoking. Careful planning and the provision of adequate follow up are essential to maximize the benefit of group discussion.

Facts And Background Information

The number of older people living in Canadian society is on the rise and many of these older Canadians suffer from abuse or neglect.

Abuse is any action / inaction perpetrated by a person in a position of trust, which jeopardizes the health or well-being of an elderly person .

It may include:

PHYSICAL PSYCHOLOGICAL OR EMOTIONAL FINANCIAL SEXUAL
DENIAL OF CIVIL /HUMAN RIGHTS NEGLECT MEDICATION ABUSE

The most valuable solution to any social problem is prevention and the basis for prevention of elder abuse is to create more awareness.

Who Abuses?

- Abusers may be family members (spouse, son, daughter, relative) or anyone else who has power in the relationship with the older person.
- The abuser of an elderly person may be financially dependent on the victim.
- The abuser of an elderly person may be suffering from a personality disorder, drug or alcohol abuse or an emotional problem.
- Abuse of elderly persons from professionals usually arises in the form of neglect, poor care or overall disrespect of the older person. In residential care the abuse of the elderly may include financial abuse or theft.



Who Is Likely To Be An Abuser ? Each of us is a potential abuser. Whether or not we will become an abuser depends on many things. Most people will not, but people who abuse older adults are more likely to have negative attitudes towards aging or paternalistic attitudes toward older people. They are more likely to view the old person as a child, rather than as an adult who has the right to make decisions for himself or herself. If we see someone as childlike or somehow “inferior”, it becomes a lot easier to rationalize why we are treating the older

person the way we are.

Another very common characteristic of abusers is that they often use “power and control” techniques to get the abused person to do what they want. Power and control techniques include things like threatening or intimidating. Power and control also includes using “privilege” (“you can’t do that because you’re old/ a woman,,an Indian” or “Only I can do this because I am a man/working/young”). These techniques also include things like isolating the abused person so that she or he doesn’t get a chance to learn if what the abuser is saying or doing is wrong. Some people think that abusers are reacting to stresses such as being unemployed, having a drinking problem , or caring for someone whose health is very poor. While these

things may increase stress for people, most people do not handle even extreme stress destructively by hitting or psychologically abusing someone else. Instead, they look for constructive ways of dealing with stress. Abusers often use problems like drinking or drug abuse as justifications for their behaviour (“I only did it because I drank too much that night”) but in many cases, the abuser drinks so that he or she has an excuse for the abuse.

Because we all have the potential for being an abuser, we each have a responsibility to see that we don’t become one.

Myths and Realities

The teens in the video respond to the case study they have just seen and share their perceptions. These are their personal and spontaneous reactions. Each of their perceptions provides an opportunity for discussion and/or challenge.

The following myths and realities identify misconceptions and many of the facets of the increasing problem of abuse and neglect of older people.

THE MYTH: The abused person must have done something in the past that led to his or her children being this way now.

THE REALITY: If we ask adults who were abused as children how they react to their children or their parents, we learn that some actively avoid violence, others refuse to have any contact at all with abusive parents and only some abuse their parents. There is no simple or direct connection between childhood abuse and adult behaviour.

THE MYTH: Older adults who abused in the past deserve it if they are abused by others now.

THE REALITY: Abuse of anyone should be unacceptable. Although we cannot control or change the way our parents behaved to us in the past, we can control the way we act towards them and our children. We can take responsibility for our own actions.

THE MYTH: People who are abused must be emotionally weak to allow themselves to get into that situation.

THE REALITY: People who stay in abusive situations do so for a variety of reasons, including some reasons that in other contexts we usually consider as positive -- e.g. loyalty to family or love. Many older people have been abused for years and somehow have had strength to survive incredibly difficult situations. Researchers call this characteristic “hardiness” and consider it a positive trait, not emotional weakness.

THE MYTH: If an older adult returns to an abusive situation, he or she must actually enjoy it.

THE REALITY: Abuse is not enjoyable. Whether a person returns to an abusive situation, depends on a lot of things. In particular, it depends on whether there are acceptable alternatives, such as a safe (and affordable) place to live and whether the person has support of other people to make it through an extremely difficult period of his or her life. It also depends on social attitudes, such as sticking with

families, no matter what.

THE MYTH: Older adults are abused because they are dependent on their children and are burdens on them.

THE REALITY: Most of us depend on others for something, but we don't abuse them. In many cases, the grown children are dependent on their abused parents, not the other way around. The grown children may be depending on the parent for money, a place to live, or other things. They may be angry that they are dependent and strike out at the person who is the easiest target – their parent.

THE MYTH: It's not really abuse when you "bully" your parents or grandparents into doing something that really is in their best interests.

THE REALITY: Forcing people, intimidating them, threatening them to do what you want, even if it looks as if it is best for them, essentially, acting this way says that you don't trust their judgment or their capability to decide. Even though they are adults, you are treating them as if they were small children.

THE MYTH: Many older adults who are abused are simply socially isolated and just need to socialize more.

THE REALITY: Abuse is a lot more complicated than that. Although many abused older adults are socially isolated, it is often the abuser who creates the isolation, even preventing the person from going out or talking to old friends or neighbours. This makes it easier to abuse, because there is no one around to tell the abuser what they are doing is wrong or to let the abused person know that they don't have to put up with this.

THE MYTH: Older people who are abused have "negative traits" , such as low self esteem or passivity which make them predisposed to abuse.

THE REALITY: Like the rest of us, older people who are abused have both positive and negative traits. There is very little evidence that victims of abuse were passive or had low self esteem before they were abused. Instead, the abuse destroys self esteem and forces passivity on even very strong persons.

THE MYTH: Fighting, violence or harm in the family is a private matter.

THE REALITY: Many forms of abuse committed against older persons are crimes. Hitting is an assault; signing a person's cheque or taking money out of their account without their consent is fraud or theft; threatening can be criminal intimidation or harassment. These acts are crimes no matter whether the person is a stranger or your grandmother.

Adolescents and Young Adults

As a result of viewing the video *Perceptions of Abuse*, and participating in classroom activities and discussions, the students will:

1. Become aware of and begin to understand the issue of neglect and abuse of older people in our society.
2. Begin to recognize some of the personality characteristics, family dynamics and lifestyle situations which contribute to, and may cause, an abusive situation.
3. Understand that neglect and abuse of older people is a serious problem and, regardless of age, each one of us can play a part in its prevention.
4. Become aware of local resources, which can provide answers to questions, should they identify and need information about an abusive situation in their own lives.

To encourage the students to think about the topic of elder abuse they could complete the following sentences:

1. Older people are: _____

2. The abuse and neglect of older people is: _____

3. Victims of elder abuse are: _____

4. Those who neglect or abuse elders are: _____

- Elder abuse is a highly complex social issue with implications for the individual, family and society.
- Encourage students to explore issues such as self-esteem, isolation and financial independence.
- There are no right or wrong responses to the suggested discussion questions which are intended as a guide only.

1. *What is your reaction to the video?*
2. *Many different concerns and issues were raised in the video. What were some of them?*
3. *How did you feel after hearing Norman's story?*
4. *What feelings did you experience as you watched the video from beginning to end?*
5. *Are your feelings similar to what you imagine your parents might have experienced if they had an opportunity to view the video? Why do you think so?*

Sharing Perceptions

1. Shortly after viewing the Norman video the students began discussing the issue of how Norman became a victim. How different are your perceptions?
2. What are your thoughts on how older people become victims of abuse?
3. One of the teens says “we should focus on education and showing the people who are being abused what they are doing that could possibly encourage it”.
 - How does this affect our perceptions of responsibility for abuse?
 - Can older people perpetuate their abuse?
 - In what ways can adults learn to protect themselves from possible future abuse?
4. The students used a variety of key words as they were addressing the nature of elder abuse. Two of the words were **POWER** and **CONTROL**:
 - How does one lose power and control?
 - How do these aspects of a relationship play themselves out in "nice" families ?
 - How do we keep a "balance" of power or equality in relationships?
5. Consider the reasons that we hear so little about the abuse and neglect of older people;
 - Why does it remain so hidden?
 - Does this vary from culture to culture?

6. One of the students notes that it is easy to neglect someone and that you have to make an effort if you want to include them. What is your point of view?
7. Just prior to this comment, one of the group members shared a story of an older woman who talks about wanting to die because she lives alone. Her daughter has moved away and she feels ignored. Is this neglect? Why or why not?
8. At one point in the video, there is some discussion on how abusers become abusers. It is suggested that even younger parents could be victims and may be contributing to this in the way they are raising their own children. What do you think?
9. One of the young men in the video responds to a question which asks whether he could imagine himself as an abuser or a victim, by pointing out that he and his parents are very close and they talk all the time. Do you think this is enough to prevent elder abuse? Is there a connection between elder abuse prevention and having good communication skills in a family?
10. Is an increased awareness of elder abuse and neglect enough to prevent it?

Personal Experiences

1. Have you had any personal contact with an abused older person?
2. What form of abuse was it?
3. Was the problem resolved ? If so - how?
4. Were drugs and/or alcohol a contributing factor?
5. Was the abused person helped by any person/agency?
6. What additional help, if any, was needed to solve the problem?

Problem Solving

1. What can youth do about abuse and neglect of older people?
2. What is the role of seniors?... middle years people (your parents)?
3. Should government play a role? If so, how?
4. What other groups or organizations could be involved?
5. At the present time, where could a person go for help in this community?
6. What important life skills could we learn and practice so that we are more likely to prevent situations where we could be either a victim or an abuser?

The Middle Years

This generation is the sandwiched population, caught between older parents and younger children. Perceptions of Abuse, is a powerful catalyst for discussion among this group. The use of the video will enable participants to:

- *allow the acknowledgement of the existence of elder abuse*
- *promote a problem solving discussion*
- *acknowledge and support the stresses of the middle years, including various care giving responsibilities*
- *encourage the middle years to evaluate repeating patterns of family behaviour, both as a child of an older parent and as a parent of a child*
- *encourage the middle years to consider their own aging process.*

Special Considerations

Acceptance

When bringing a group together for viewing be prepared for some denial of the problem. Initially there may be resistance to acknowledging the problem. Elder abuse is a painful reality and the topic must be treated with great sensitivity.

Group Size

A group of twelve to fourteen adults is ideal, while at least four participants would be required to provide a stimulating discussion. Keep in mind that most adults have already put in a full day. Try to limit the meeting to two hours with a break for light refreshments.

The Caregiver Factor

Some of the participants may actually be care giving for an older adult. You may want to ask who has or is currently caring for an older person. Provide an opportunity for them to share their knowledge and experience.

- Elder abuse is a highly complex social issue with implications for the individual, family and society.
- Encourage participants to explore issues such as self-esteem, isolation and financial independence.
- There are no right or wrong responses to the following suggested discussion questions which are intended as a guide only.

1. What are your thoughts about this video?
2. How did you feel after hearing Norman's story?
3. What are your reactions to the adolescents' perceptions?

Sharing Perceptions

After viewing the video the teens began discussing how Norman's situation may have developed.

- How are your observations different from those of the adolescents?

To stimulate participants to consider the factors which may lead to the abuse of older people:

1. How do you think Norman's sons became abusers?
2. What are your thoughts on how victimization occurs?
3. How might drugs or alcohol be a contributing factor in elder abuse?
4. One of the teens says "we should focus on education and showing the people who are being abused what they are doing that could possibly encourage it".
 - How does this affect our perceptions of responsibility for abuse?
 - Can older people perpetuate their abuse?
 - In what ways can adults learn to protect themselves from possible future abuse?

It is important to consider how other family members may be involved in the problem and the solution.

- Where do you think Norman's wife and other family members might be in this story?

Consider the reasons that we hear so little about the abuse and neglect of older people:

- Why does it remain so hidden?
- Does this vary from culture to culture?

One young woman shared a story of an older woman who wants to die because she is alone, her daughter has moved away and she feels ignored.

- Is the older woman being neglected?

Another young participant notes that “it is easy to neglect someone and an effort has to be made if you want to include them”.

- What does this imply?

One of the young men in the video responds to a question asking if he could imagine himself as an abuser or victim by pointing out that he and his parents are very close and that they talk all the time.

- Do you think open communication is enough to prevent elder abuse?

Personal Experiences

1. Have you had any personal contact with an abused older person or an abuser?
2. What form did the abuse take?
3. What were the problems involved? Were any solved? Has the situation improved?
4. Were drugs or alcohol a contributing factor?
5. Has the abused elder been helped by a person or agency? Has the abuser been helped by a person or agency?
6. What additional help, if any, is needed to resolve the problem?

Problem Solving

1. How can we help those who are currently being abused or neglected?

2. How can people protect themselves from becoming victims?
3. What steps can we take to ensure we do not become abusers or raise abusers?
4. Does government have a role to play in elder abuse issues?
5. Should anyone else be involved?

Special Considerations

Acceptance

When bringing a group together for viewing be prepared for some denial of the problem. Initially there may be resistance to acknowledging the problem. Elder abuse is a painful reality and the topic must be treated with great sensitivity.

Group Size

A group of twelve to fourteen adults is ideal, while at least four participants would be required to provide a stimulating discussion. Keep in mind that most adults have already put in a full day. Try to limit the meeting to two hours with a break for light refreshments.

The Caregiver Factor

Some of the participants may actually be care giving for an older adult. You may want to ask who has or is currently caring for an older person. Provide an opportunity for them to share their knowledge and experience.

Seniors

Perceptions of Abuse may be used to stimulate the following learning outcomes:

- *Allow acknowledgement of the existence of the problem*
- *Allow for discussion regarding possible solutions to the problem*
- *Provide support for those who have felt “alone” as abused elders*
- *Allow seniors to view the problem of elder abuse against the backdrop of repeating patterns of family behaviour*
- *Empower seniors to take appropriate action in abusive situations.*

Special Considerations

Acceptance

When bringing the group together for viewing there may initially be denial of the problem. Resistance to acknowledging elder abuse may be present. It is a painful reality and the topic must be treated with the utmost sensitivity.

Group Size

In general, seniors do not participate well in large groups due to decreased sensory acuity. Group size is an important consideration. It is suggested a group of ten participants would be a maximum group size while at least four participants would be required to provide stimulating discussion.

Consideration of Special Needs

It is important to determine the special needs of your group. In order to maximize participation for seniors several important factors need consideration.

Visual impairment is also common in the elderly. Group members must be seated in a manner which allows a good view of the television monitor. It is best to close curtains to reduce glare and to provide only soft background lighting during the viewing of the video.

Hearing loss is common in the elderly and often accounts for their lack of participation in group discussion. When deficits in this area are present all group members should be reminded to speak loudly and clearly. Those with hearing impairments should be encouraged to ask for repetition as required and should be assured that this will not cause problems for others present. Where there are several group members with hearing impairment it would be helpful to place group members near to one another. Try to limit the group to six to eight participants. An amplification system with a cordless microphone may assist participants to hear the questions and responses of other group members. The group leader must also be prepared to provide repetition of questions and responses.

Decreased lung capacity is another physical factor that will impact upon the effectiveness of group discussion. Limited lung capacity affects the volume and projection of speech. It may compound the difficulties other group members may be experiencing with hearing. Repetition of group member responses will facilitate effective group discussion when this problem is evident.

Ability to concentrate for prolonged periods of time may be limited. Maximum benefit will be achieved through limiting group sessions to a maximum of one hour. Ensure that the viewing and discussion will take place in an area which is free of competing stimuli. Your group's ability to comprehend information and respond appropriately will determine the need for slightly shorter or longer sessions.

Short term memory loss is another factor to consider. Seniors with severe short term memory loss are not suitable for participation in this type of group discussion. Group members with mild short term memory loss will benefit from repetition in the presentation of learning materials and by slowing the rate of the presentation. Beginning each group session with a recap of the discussion to date will help to solidify information in the minds of the participants. An opportunity to view the video more than once is essential to ensure that the information presented is sufficiently retained.

- Elder abuse is a highly complex social issue with implications for the individual, family and society.
 - Encourage participants to explore issues such as self-esteem, isolation and financial independence.
 - There are no right or wrong responses to the following suggested discussion questions.
1. The teens are asked to talk about what they have learned. One member says she knew nothing about elder abuse before the discussion. Were you aware of the problem before it was brought to your attention today? Why do you think that the problem of elder abuse remains hidden?
 2. Did the content of the video provide you with any new insights? If so, what are they?
 3. How did you feel after hearing Norman's story?
 4. While watching the video, did you consider what you would do if you were in Norman's situation? If so, what are your thoughts regarding Norman's options?
 5. What were your thoughts about the student's insights and perceptions?

Sharing Perceptions

1. Can you answer Norman's opening question? "Sometimes I sit and think and I say to myself, why did this happen to me? What's the reason?"
2. Norman has lived in alternative situations but always returns home even though he knows that he might face more abuse. Why?
3. Norman has been encouraged to make contact with the seniors' centre. How do you think this might help? Why do you think Norman is reluctant to do this?
4. Can you describe any of Norman's characteristics that might make it difficult for him to put an end to his abusive situation?
5. Norman is able to talk about his situation. Do you think it might be difficult for others in a similar situation to talk about this problem? Why?
6. Is anyone capable of elder abuse? Do you think elder abuse happens with conscious intent?
7. Take a moment now to consider whether there are any hypothetical circumstances that would lead you to be understanding of the behaviour of Norman's sons.

Personal Experiences

1. Have you had any personal contact with an abused person?
2. What form of abuse was it?
3. Was the problem resolved?
4. Were drugs and/or alcohol a contributing factor?
5. Was the abused person helped by any person/agency?
6. What additional help, if any, was needed to resolve the problem?

Problem Solving

1. Do you think there is a need for more information on elder abuse? How would this help?
2. The teens in the video thought that education might help to break the cycle of elder abuse. How would education on this topic in the school system be of help?
3. One of the teens says that you have to realize you have a problem in order to get help to solve it. Would you be more able to identify elder abuse after today's video and discussion?
4. What would you do to be supportive to a friend who has told you that they were being abused?
5. "There is nothing to break the cycle unless there is one person who really understands it." Drawing upon your life experience, do you think that this statement made by a teen in the video is correct?

Role Play Scenarios

The following activity will help participants to better understand the complex nature of abuse and neglect of older people.

- * The role playing experience will enable groups to recognize and explore some of the many circumstances of existing elder abuse.
- * Participants will have the opportunity to examine situations which may potentially lead to abuse and neglect of older people.
- * The exercise is designed so that each scenario may have a number of possible outcomes.
- * The role playing activities encourage creative problem solving.
- * The involvement of the observers and the players will vary considerably with each age group.

It is suggested that facilitators refer to the background information package and the Myths and Realities Chart for reference.

Name: Bernice Cayer

Health Status: Good

Background: You are 69, very independent, and manage quite well living on your own. You do not want to move because you wish to keep your independence. Your son and daughter-in-law are pressuring you to sell your house and to move in with them. They have a small house with very little extra space and another child on the way. They have threatened that if you don't sell your house and move in with them, they might just stop visiting you.

Name: Dina Truscott

Health Status: Tendency to high blood pressure

Background: You live with your daughter and four children. Two of the children have begun to verbally abuse you for no apparent reason. You are concerned and hurt, but your daughter thinks you are over reacting and does not share your concern. The abuse gets quite fierce sometimes and you do not know what to do - this is your only home.

Name: Carol Welton

Health Status: Good

Background: You are 73, and have been living alone since you and your husband got divorced about thirty years ago. You receive Pensions but it is barely enough to live on. When your daughter asks to move in and offers to pay room and board, you like the idea for two reasons: It will be great to have the company and you could use the extra money. However, after the first two months, tension begins to develop, and she actually struck you in anger one day. You were really shocked after the first time, but now it has happened many more times, and you are wondering what you should do.

Name: Jessie Klasson

Health Status: Limited hearing

Background: You and your husband led a very active and full life. Although you didn't have a paying career, you devoted your life to making a good home for your children and husband. You sold the family home and moved to an apartment just before he died. You were totally shocked when he left all his money to your two sons, and provisions for you to receive a monthly allowance from them for the rest of your life. You are devastated and wonder why he would ever do such a thing. At 72, you know that you might have to put up with this for a long time.

Name: Cynthia Hogan

Health Status: Good

Background: You live in a small apartment in your son's house, which is close to all your friends and is within walking distance to the bus and many other amenities. You love the area and feel fortunate to be able to live here because your daughter lives here. Suddenly, your daughter announces that she is going to move to a rural area that is approximately a two hour drive from the city. She says that she needs you to go with her to help pay for the new house. Also, you look after her children a great many times when she is not home, and you suspect that she wants you to go for that reason as well.

Name: Sandra Gorman

Health Status: Good

Background: You are concerned about your elderly neighbor. She lives with her son who is known to have a very quick temper. For the third time, in as many months, you have noticed that her body has had some very large and unusual bruises - once, she even had a black eye. When you asked her what happened, she dismissed it as nothing. . . but you are still wondering. . .

Name: Georgette Mosher

Health Status: Good

Background: You are very healthy, independent, and enjoy your life. At 79, you still drive and thrive on your independent lifestyle. When you purchased your small home thirty years ago for \$19,000, you did not dream that one day it would be worth \$400,000. Your three children are pressuring you very hard to sell the house so that they can use the money that you promised them, now, rather than waiting until your death.

(Each of them said that you can live one-third of the year in each of their homes.)

Name: Amy Tam

Health Status: Deteriorating cognitive ability - might be the result of inadequate caregiving

Background: You are wealthy enough to afford a luxury condominium. You are aware that the recent deterioration of your mental condition might be the result of trying to cope with your mentally ill daughter. Although she has hit you once or twice, and uses large sums of your money to buy alcohol, you feel anything is better than having to move to a nursing facility.

Name: Tony Williams

Health Status: Very bad arthritis

Background: You are a resident in a nursing home which is in a different province than where your children are residing. You rarely have visitors, and it seems there are very few staff around to talk to. In fact, lately, you've seen staff only when they come to take you in your wheelchair to the dining room for meals. Yesterday, during lunch, you accidentally knocked over a glass of juice. The staff person screamed a very rude remark to you. You were so upset you said nothing.

Name: Rita McIntyre

Health Status: Walks with a cane

Background: Your aunt, who is 82, was placed in a nursing facility by her son who doesn't live close enough to visit regularly. During your weekly visits, you noticed that your aunt was hardly able to speak to you and you wondered about the strength of her medication. At times, you thought you should tell somebody, but then you thought her son must know because he placed her here. You didn't really feel comfortable mentioning it to the nurses because you figured they must know what they are doing.

Name: Betty Winters

Health Status: Good

Background: Your husband died several years ago and your daughter, who is in her 30's, still lives with you and works at a local bank. When your daughter was under a lot of stress at work, she actually came home and took out her frustrations on you by being extremely verbally abusive. It is very upsetting, but under no circumstances would you ever consider telling anybody – even your very best friend, because, after all, you need to protect your own daughter.

Name: Winnifred Graham

Health Status: Active, healthy

Background: You are 60 years of age, and have some concerns about your 86 year old mother. Your younger brother and his wife are trying to force her to sell her house so that she can lend them the money to buy a new house. She has been promised that she can live with them for the rest of her life. She is still very capable of living on her own, and is not sure about this proposal. She has come to ask you for advice.

Name: Elizabeth Fairweather

Health Status: No longer able to walk

Background: You are in a nursing home which is to be reputed to be one of the best in the area. Your entire pension cheque goes towards your care. You have asked your family doctor several times during her visits to check on why you do not get your medication regularly, and to insist that you are taken out of bed daily, as promised. Another week has gone by and there is no change.

Name: Marian Joseph

Health Status: Frail, bad eyesight

Background: You are 78 and live in your own home with your 35 year old daughter who has never left home. Although she works, she never seems to have enough money. She often helps with errands and looks after your banking. You noticed that your bank balance is much smaller than it should be, but your daughter denies that she knows anything about the loss. This has happened quite a few times. Just recently, you noticed one of your expensive rings was missing and you are wondering what you should do.

Elder Abuse and The Law

- * *Adult protection legislation implies that older people are incompetent and unable to make the report on their own resulting in disempowerment and infantilism*
- * *Identification of the problem of elder abuse is often difficult because of the usual reluctance of the victim to report the incidents of the abuse.*
- * *Healthcare provider suspicions of abuse are often not acted upon because of the anticipated lack of corroboration among the people concerned.*
- * *Individuals who are being abused often fear reprisal or facility placement as possible retaliation to their report of the abuse.*

But Not In Canada, Eh?

Question:

If Norman lived in Canada, would his situation be any different as far as laying or dropping charges?

Answer:

Probably not, and that is why people who have been abused need considerable support and assistance in handling these difficult situations. Throughout most of Canada, domestic violence is handled this way: if police have evidence that a spouse or a person living common law has been assaulted, the police can press charges, regardless of what the victim wants. When the decision to lay charges rests solely with the police, it can take pressure off the person who has been abused. But this police charging policy does not extend to assaults by adult sons, daughters or other relatives. Also, in practice, the police very seldom lay charges if the husband or wife is a senior.

If the abused person does not want to, or is afraid to, co-operate with the police, it is less likely that the police will lay charges, except where the physical damage resulting from the attack is severe. Even if charges are laid, without the abused person's willingness to testify, the prosecutor's job is very difficult. For example, Norman might say that he will deny the incident in court. In this case, it is unlikely the prosecutor will force Norman to perjure himself. The prosecutor knows that without Norman's true testimony, chances of the son's conviction are slight. Even where the son is found guilty, if Norman asks for leniency on his son's behalf, the judge may decide to discharge the criminal conviction. In short, without the victim's cooperation, the chance of a criminal conviction in these types of cases is not great.

Resources

For information or help in situations of suspected abuse and/or neglect of elderly persons your primary point of entry would be your local Health Department, Continuing Care Program. They will refer agencies such as Ministry of Social Services, Mental Health Community Care Teams and Family Services. A variety of ethnic agencies are also available to provide assistance. The Public Trustee handles legal and financial affairs for those unable to do so. A Crisis Line is available in most cities on a 24 hour basis. For many other services which are available for seniors and their families refer to the Information Services Red Book at your local library or community service.