

IDENTIFYING SIGNS OF ABUSE

How can you spot abuse?

People may be subjected to a number of different types of abuse. The list of possible indicators and examples of behaviour is not exhaustive.

Physical abuse

Evidence of any one indicator from the following list should not be taken on its own as proof that abuse is occurring. However, it should alert practitioners to make further assessments and to consider other factors associated with the adult at risk's situation.

Types of physical abuse

- Hitting, slapping, punching, kicking, hair-pulling, biting, pushing
- Rough handling
- Scalding and burning
- Physical punishments
- Inappropriate or unlawful use of restraint
- Making someone purposefully uncomfortable (e.g. opening a window and removing blankets)
- Involuntary isolation or confinement
- Misuse of medication (e.g. over-sedation)
- Forcible feeding or withholding food
- Restricting movement (e.g. tying someone to a chair)

Possible indicators of physical abuse

- No explanation for injuries or inconsistency with the account of what happened
- Injuries are inconsistent with the person's lifestyle
- Bruising, cuts, welts, burns and/or marks on the body or loss of hair in clumps
- Frequent injuries
- Unexplained falls
- Subdued or changed behaviour in the presence of a carer
- Signs of malnutrition
- Failure to seek medical treatment or frequent changes of GP

Sexual abuse

Evidence of any one indicator from the following list should not be taken on its own as proof that abuse is occurring. However, it should alert practitioners to make further assessments and to consider other factors associated with the adult at risk's situation.

Types of sexual abuse

- Rape, attempted rape or sexual assault
- Inappropriate touch anywhere
- Masturbation of either or both persons
- Sexual penetration or attempted penetration of the vagina, anus or mouth
- Any sexual activity that the person lacks the capacity to consent to
- Inappropriate looking, sexual teasing or innuendo or sexual harassment
- Sexual photography or forced use of pornography or witnessing of sexual acts
- Indecent exposure

Possible indicators of sexual abuse

- Bruising, particularly to the thighs, buttocks and upper arms and marks on the neck
- Torn, stained or bloody underclothing
- Bleeding, pain or itching in the genital area
- Unusual difficulty in walking or sitting
- Foreign bodies in genital or rectal openings
- Infections, unexplained genital discharge, or sexually transmitted diseases
- Pregnancy in a woman who is unable to consent to sexual intercourse
- The uncharacteristic use of explicit sexual language or significant changes in sexual behaviour or attitude
- Incontinence not related to any medical diagnosis
- Self-harming
- Poor concentration, withdrawal, sleep disturbance
- Excessive fear/apprehension of, or withdrawal from, relationships
- Fear of receiving help with personal care
- Reluctance to be alone with a known individual

Psychological or emotional abuse

Evidence of any one indicator from the following list should not be taken on its own as proof that abuse is occurring. However, it should alert practitioners to make further assessments and to consider other factors associated with the adult at risk's situation.

Types of psychological or emotional abuse

- Enforced social isolation – preventing someone accessing services, educational and social opportunities and seeing friends
- Removing mobility or communication aids or intentionally leaving someone unattended when they need assistance
- Preventing someone from meeting their religious and cultural needs
- Preventing the expression of choice and opinion
- Failure to respect privacy
- Preventing stimulation, meaningful occupation or activities
- Intimidation, harassment, use of threats, humiliation, bullying, swearing or verbal abuse
- Addressing a person in a patronising or infantilising way

Possible indicators of psychological or emotional abuse

- An air of silence when a certain person is present
- Withdrawal or change in the psychological state of the person
- Insomnia
- Low self-esteem
- Uncooperative and aggressive behaviour
- A change of appetite, weight loss/gain
- Signs of distress: tearfulness, anger
- Apparent false claims by a paid or unpaid carer to attract unnecessary treatment

Financial or material abuse

Evidence of any one indicator from the following list should not be taken on its own as proof that abuse is occurring. However, it should alert practitioners to make further assessments and to consider other factors associated with the adult at risk's situation.

Types of financial or material abuse

- Theft of money or possessions
- Fraud
- Preventing a person from accessing their own money or assets
- Employees taking a loan from a person using the service
- Undue pressure, duress, threat or undue influence put on the person in connection with loans, wills, property, inheritance or financial transactions
- Arranging less care than is needed to save money to maximise inheritance
- Denying assistance to manage/monitor financial affairs
- Denying assistance to access benefits
- Misuse of personal allowance in a care home
- Someone moving into a person's home and living rent free without agreed financial arrangements
- False representation, using another person's bank account, cards or documents
- Exploitation of a person's money or assets, e.g. unauthorised use of a car
- Misuse of a power of attorney, deputy, appointeeship or other legal authority

Possible indicators of financial or material abuse

- Missing personal possessions
- Unexplained lack of money or inability to maintain lifestyle
- Unexplained withdrawal of funds from accounts
- Power of attorney or lasting power of attorney (LPA) being obtained after the person has ceased to have mental capacity
- Failure to register an LPA after the person has ceased to have mental capacity to manage their finances, so that it appears that they are continuing to do so
- The person allocated to manage financial affairs is evasive or uncooperative
- The family or others show unusual interest in the assets of the person
- Signs of financial hardship in cases where the adult at risk's financial affairs are being managed by a court appointed deputy, attorney or LPA
- Recent changes in deeds or title to property
- Rent arrears and eviction notices

- A lack of clear financial accounts held by a care home or service
- Failure to provide receipts for shopping or other financial transactions carried out on behalf of the person
- Disparity between the person's living conditions and their financial resources,
e.g. insufficient food in the house

Neglect and acts of omission

Evidence of any one indicator from the following list should not be taken on its own as proof that abuse is occurring. However, it should alert practitioners to make further assessments and to consider other factors associated with the adult at risk's situation.

Types of neglect and acts of omission

- Failure to provide or allow access to food, shelter, clothing, heating, stimulation and activity, personal or medical care
- Failure to provide care in the way the person wants
- Failure to administer medication as prescribed
- Refusal of access to visitors
- Not taking account of individuals' cultural, religious or ethnic needs
- Not taking account of educational, social and recreational needs
- Ignoring or isolating the person
- Failure to allow choice and preventing people from making their own decisions
- Failure to allow use of glasses, hearing aids, dentures, etc.
- Failure to ensure appropriate privacy and dignity

Possible indicators of neglect and acts of omission

- Poor environment – dirty or unhygienic
- Poor physical condition and/or personal hygiene
- Pressure sores or ulcers
- Malnutrition or unexplained weight loss
- Untreated injuries and medical problems
- Inconsistent or reluctant contact with medical and social care organisations
- Accumulation of untaken medication
- Uncharacteristic failure to engage in social interaction
- Inappropriate or inadequate clothing

Discriminatory abuse

Evidence of any one indicator from the following list should not be taken on its own as proof that abuse is occurring. However, it should alert practitioners to make further assessments and to consider other factors associated with the adult at risk's situation.

Types of discriminatory abuse

- Unequal treatment based on age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex or sexual orientation (known as 'protected characteristics' under the Equality Act 2010)
- Verbal abuse, derogatory remarks or inappropriate use of language related to a protected characteristic
- Denying access to communication aids, not allowing access to an interpreter, signer or lip-reader
- Harassment or deliberate exclusion on the grounds of a protected characteristic
- Denying basic rights to healthcare, education, employment and criminal justice relating to a protected characteristic
- Substandard service provision relating to a protected characteristic

Possible indicators of discriminatory abuse

- The person appears withdrawn and isolated
- Expressions of anger, frustration, fear or anxiety
- The support on offer does not take account of the person's individual needs in terms of a protected characteristic

Institutional abuse

Evidence of any one indicator from the following list should not be taken on its own as proof that abuse is occurring. However, it should alert practitioners to make further assessments and to consider other factors associated with the adult at risk's situation.

Types of institutional abuse

- Discouraging visits or the involvement of relatives or friends
- Run-down or overcrowded establishment
- Authoritarian management or rigid regimes
- Lack of leadership and supervision
- Insufficient staff or high turnover resulting in poor quality care
- Abusive and disrespectful attitudes towards people using the service
- Inappropriate use of restraints
- Lack of respect for dignity and privacy
- Failure to manage residents with abusive behaviour
- Not providing adequate food and drink, or assistance with eating
- Not offering choice or promoting independence
- Misuse of medication
- Failure to provide care with dentures, spectacles or hearing aids
- Not taking account of individuals' cultural, religious or ethnic needs
- Failure to respond to abuse appropriately
- Interference with personal correspondence or communication
- Failure to respond to complaints

Possible indicators of institutional abuse

- Lack of flexibility and choice for adults using the service
- Inadequate staffing levels
- People being hungry or dehydrated
- Poor standards of care
- Lack of personal clothing and possessions and communal use of personal items
- Lack of adequate procedures
- Poor record-keeping and missing documents
- Absence of visitors
- Few social, recreational and educational activities
- Public discussion of personal matters or unnecessary exposure during bathing or using the toilet
- Absence of individual care plans
- Lack of management overview and support