



Elder Abuse Education and Awareness Toolkit

A resource for the Caledon
and Dufferin communities



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This resource was developed with the support of the Government of Ontario, in partnership with Elder Abuse Prevention Ontario and Ageing Well in Caledon Dufferin Collaborative Network.

Land Acknowledgment

The Town acknowledges that it is situated on lands that are home to many Indigenous Peoples from across Turtle Island (North America). The Town realizes the need and value of understanding more about the rich history of this land and its Indigenous Peoples, which will help the Town be better neighbours and partners.

This land is part of the Treaty Lands and Territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, and part of the traditional Territory of the Huron-Wendat, Haudenosaunee Peoples, and the Anishnabek of the Williams Treaties.

We acknowledge the enduring presence and deep traditional knowledge and perspectives of the Indigenous Peoples with whom we share this land today.

Introduction

Abuse can happen to anyone.

No matter their age, gender, race, religion, or finances. Although some may think it only affects other people, the rise of elder abuse in Ontario is bringing this problem closer to home every year. Unfortunately, abuse is increasingly effecting us later in life and this is expected to become more common over the next decade ([WHO, 2023](#)). The latest research suggests that elder abuse affects between 8% - 10% of adults aged 55 and older in Ontario ([NICE 2015](#)). Evidence also suggests that these numbers are underreported due to victims being silenced by stigma, fear, and a lack of resources. The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) estimates that only 1 in 5 cases of elder abuse are reported to those who can help (2012).

To support the education and awareness of this growing issue, the Town of Caledon, in collaboration with Ageing Well in Caledon Dufferin (AWICD), has developed this resource for older adults, their caregivers, and their families. In this toolkit, we provide prevention techniques, tools for early identification, and information on how to report abuse if needed. Our goal is to help you age well and safely in place within Caledon and Dufferin communities by providing you with the information and resources you may need.

For more information on Age-Friendly Caledon or Ageing Well in Caledon Dufferin please email us or visit one of the websites below.

Sincerely,

Age-Friendly Caledon

Email: adult55@caledon.ca | Website: www.caledon.ca/adult55

Ageing Well in Caledon Dufferin Collaborative Network

Email: ageingwellcd@gmail.com | Website: www.awicd.org

Defining Elder Abuse



When defining elder abuse, it's important to understand that each case can look and feel very different. You or someone you know may find yourself experiencing mistreatment with very different details than those provided below. Please use the information provided as only a guide and reach out to the resources provided for additional support if needed.

Elder Abuse is generally broken into different categories based on the style of abuse.

Financial Abuse

Financial abuse is classified as mistreatment or manipulation involving property, credit, and financial assets. Common examples include the misuse of power of attorney, unexplained bank transactions, forged signatures on cheques and documents and unauthorized withdrawal of funds. There could also be attempts to change a will, house title and bank account information, or pressure to gain legal consent from an older adult to do so. Living with an older person without permission, failing to contribute to expenses, or accepting money from an individual for care or services which are not provided can also be considered financial abuse ([Elder Abuse Prevention Ontario, 2022](#)).

Fraud and Scams

This specific form of financial abuse refers to an act of dishonesty used to gain control of someone's finances or personal property. As technology advances, the style and methods of these crimes are constantly changing. Those trying to gain control of someone else's property commonly use fake phone calls, text messages and emails to make contact. They may claim to be anyone from government officials to lottery representatives. They can be friendly, professional and very convincing ([GOC, 2021](#)).

If you or someone you know is looking for more information on frauds and scams, [The Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre](#) provides information, prevention, identification and guidance on reporting. Visit their website at www.antifraudcentre.ca or get in touch by phone at 1-888-495-8501.

To access law enforcement regarding a fraud or scam please get in touch with the police non-emergency line 1-888-310-1122.

Did you know?

The World Health Organization defines ageism as “the stereotypes (how we think), prejudice (how we feel) and discrimination (how we act) towards others or oneself based on age”.

Stereotypes are beliefs that are generalized towards a whole group of people. If older adults accept stereotypes and negative views about themselves, self-ageism can occur. Age is just one aspect of a person's identity and experiences of ageism can be influenced by other characteristics, such as gender or ethnicity.

During a recent survey by the Government of Canada more than 48% of respondents indicated that they had experienced ageism personally.

Neglect

Neglect refers to any situation where an individual is not providing adequate care. This could be on purpose (active neglect) or not on purpose (passive neglect). Active neglect refers to an individual's conscious decision to deny or refuse needed care for a dependent. Passive neglect may occur when a well-meaning loved one is simply not capable of providing necessary care due to lack of information, time or ability.

Both forms of neglect include the failure to provide acceptable living conditions for a dependent, withholding necessities (such as food and water) or abandoning them. It could also include denying access to medical attention and the incorrect use of medication. Any of these actions could result in serious health conditions such as dehydration, lack of hygiene, malnourishment, depression and many other life limiting conditions and may potentially lead to death in extreme cases ([EAPO, 2022](#)).

Psychological/Emotional Abuse

Psychological or emotional abuse refers to anything that interferes with a person's sense of safety and mental wellbeing. This could include reducing an older adult's ability to make decisions or threatening to harm them – physically or verbally. The abuser attempts to isolate the older adult and reduce their self-esteem. The goal is to frighten someone until their self-worth is jeopardized. These actions could result in depression, anxiety, confusion and isolation for the victim ([EAPO, 2022](#)).

Sexual Abuse

This type of abuse refers to unwanted sexual acts. This could include sexual comments or jokes, unwanted physical contact and/or sending or receiving explicit photographs. Being involved in sexual activity with someone who is unable to consent is also considered sexual abuse ([EAPO, 2022](#)). An individual who is experiencing this type of mistreatment may have visible physical signs of harm such as unexplained injuries or torn clothing. They may also display a dislike to being touched, are reactive when approached, or suffer from symptoms such as confusion, depression, or shame.

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse refers to any physical act by an individual that could result in injury, discomfort, or pain for the victim. The incorrect use of medication and the act of confining or constraining someone is also considered physical abuse ([EAPO, 2022](#)). An older adult experiencing physical abuse may show physical signs such as injury – like bruises. They may also display signs of being over or under medicated such as complaining of pain or being disoriented. Loved ones may also notice a decline in an older adult's health or a new or unexplained despair, depression, or fear.

For more information on categories of abuse including best practices for intervention, visit [EAPO Training Modules](#).

Did you know?

Approximately 1 in 10 Canadian older adults living in Caledon experience some form of mistreatment each year. This problem is increasing as the older adult population grows. Mistreatment of Older Adults (MOA) is associated with detrimental consequences such as premature mortality, physical or mental health morbidities and/or financial hardships. It is also associated with increased societal costs such as increased rates of healthcare utilization.

Government of Canada 2023 – COVID-19 Mistreatment of Seniors

Risk Factors



While abuse can happen to anyone, there are some reasons why older adults are at higher risk.

Isolation

When an older person is socially or physically isolated, they may lack support from loved ones.

An individual who does not have regular contact with their family and community may lean on a single individual or caregiver for everything. Depending on that caregiver's intentions, this could become a dangerous situation. An older adult without a support system may seem like an easy target to someone looking to take advantage.

History of Domestic Violence

Research shows a link between a history of domestic violence and a higher likelihood of future problems with violence. Factors contributing to this include learned behavior, decreased sensitivity and intergenerational trauma. Cycling violence often affects people for their lifetime if not addressed. This could contribute to a higher likelihood of experiencing various types of abuse in their older years.

Shared Living

Shared living becomes problematic when an older adult is manipulated into feeling unwelcome in their own home, left to pay most of expenses and are not given the opportunity to make decisions regarding themselves or their property. This often happens when adult children move back into their parents' home but could also result from new relationships or shared living arrangements ([EAPO, 2022](#)).

Addiction

Addiction refers to problematic consumption of drugs and alcohol, or obsessive behaviors such as gambling, shopping or eating. These behaviors are a result of a complicated mental process that is often fueled by trauma. Experiencing addiction or being in close contact with someone experiencing addiction always puts you at risk of exploitation and abuse. An older adult can be easily manipulated and controlled if they are experiencing substance abuse issues. Likewise, having a loved one or caregiver with addiction problems creates the possibility that an older person can become an easy target for robbery or an outlet for violence and anger.

Health Concerns, Cognitive Impairment and Mental Health Issues

Any condition that leaves an older adult reliant on others for care can create a dangerous imbalance of power. Unfortunately, people with abusive tendencies may take advantage of this vulnerability. Even loved ones with the best of intentions may not have the capacity to care for an individual that is reliant on them. Although this situation is never easy, taking the time to develop a care plan in the case of an emergency or health issue, should you need it, will help reduce the chances of such a situation happening.

Need Help?

If you or someone you know needs support, please reach out to any of the following resources. If you or someone you know are in immediate danger, please call 911.

Prevention

There are many ways you can help prevent yourself or someone you know from being in an abusive situation. Please reach out to one of the services provided in this toolkit for support should you feel that you may be at risk or are currently experiencing elder abuse.



Staying Connected

There are many reasons why maintaining a social network is important. There is increasing research that connects poor health with social isolation. Being connected to others and to our communities is proven to slow mental decline, improve the immune system and contribute to an assortment of positive health benefits (CMHA, 2023). Additionally, by having a strong social network there is a larger support system that can keep an individual in their home longer. A large social network will also reduce the strain on a single caregiver or family member from having to manage everything themselves. While not always an option, having friends and family close by and in contact on a regular basis can reduce the severity of health issues by early detection. In cases of abuse, they are often the first ones to notice the warning signs in a mistreated loved one. They can provide support while we look for ways out of bad situations and aid in making lifestyle changes when needed.

If you are an older adult who is feeling isolated there are many resources within your community to get you involved. Shop around until you find the groups and activities that work for you. Don't get discouraged if it doesn't happen right away. Take your time and find what feels right to you. Visit www.caledon.ca/adult55 to get started.

Be Informed and Understand your Rights

You don't lose rights as you age. Losing physical or mental capabilities doesn't change this. It is important to have a family member or caregiver who listens and supports you to make your own choices. A good relationship is one that consists of mutual respect ([EAPO, 2022](#)).

It is wise to familiarize yourself with the concept of ageism. The latest research suggests that half of the population holds negative attitudes towards others based on age ([WHO, 2023](#)). These negative attitudes are often the guiding force behind abuse. As we age, it is important to be aware of social stigma and keep in mind how they may be affecting ourselves or our loved ones. Recognizing these negative attitudes in others can provide us with a chance to prevent abuse.

Plan in Advance

Create a care team before you need one. Who will help with physical care and who will aid with financial decisions if you are incapable? Although it may be difficult to discuss, it is important to consider creating a living will while you are capable. Only you know what is best for you. Put it in writing and make it legally binding ([EAPO, 2022](#)).

Visit advancecareplanningontario.ca for more information on identifying a substitute decision maker (SMD) for future healthcare decisions.

There are free resources available for those interested in making a will or changing legal documentation. [Visit Legal Aid Ontario to learn more](#). Don't feel intimidated by lawyers and legal fees. Reach out to the support provided and they can help (free of charge to those who qualify).

Stay Active

Staying active and taking care of your physical and mental capacities is incredibly important in preventing abuse. Walking, biking, swimming, and participating in other exercise helps us maintain muscle, bone and cardiovascular health. It also boosts our immune systems and serotonin levels which help deal with stress, get better quality sleep and aid in digestive health ([National Initiative for the Care of the Elderly \(NICE\), 2023](#)). Being physically active is also an effective way to build coordination and reduce the [risk of falling](#), which is one of the highest causes of hospitalizations in older adults and one of the main reasons older adults in Ontario lose their independence ([PHAC, 2014](#)).

If you would like more information on how to get moving visit the [Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology](#).

Eat Well and Avoid Harmful Substances

A healthy diet paired with exercise can positively impact your quality of life. [Canada's food guide](#) is a great resource to educate ourselves about our body's nutritional needs. The latest research recommends a diet that is high in plants and reducing red meat consumption ([NICE, 2023](#)). Limiting our use of alcohol, tobacco and eliminating recreational drug use is also recommended to maintain good health.

There are many local food resources in the Caledon Dufferin area such as [Caledon Meals on Wheels](#) (CMOW), which provides members with weekly hot meals delivered right to your home. Contact your [Age-Friendly Caledon](#) team at adult55@caledon.ca for more info on Caledon Meals On Wheels, and other food related programs and food bank availability.

If you or someone you love is struggling with substance abuse, contact the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health ([CAMH](#)) for referrals and support. There are many groups in your area available to those who are ready to take the first step.

Manage your own Finances

If you are able, managing your own finances is ideal. Cashing your own cheques, setting up automatic payments and taking care of your own accounts reduces the risk of being financially victimized. This information should be private, and no one should ever pressure you into making financial decisions that make you uncomfortable. However, you may not always be able to manage this independently, so it is important to plan for the future. Keep your financial information and other important documents in a safe place and tell someone you trust where they can find the information. Appoint a power of attorney while you are mentally capable. If the time comes that you need help, you will be glad that you thought ahead and gave this responsibility to someone you trust ([EAPO, 2022](#)).

For more information on how to make a power of attorney, please [visit Community Legal Education Ontario](#).

Take advantage of the [Free Tax Clinics](#) for low income individuals offered through the [Government of Canada](#).

For more information on how to protect your finances visit [EAPO Protecting your Finances Workshop](#) for complete information on keeping your money safe. It is often difficult to know when abuse is occurring. Sometimes we get used to problematic behaviors and become desensitized. Use your instincts. If something doesn't feel right, seek a second opinion from someone you trust.

Did you know?

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines elder abuse as “a single, or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust, which causes harm or distress to an older person.”

How to Identify Abuse



There are several ways to identify that abuse is occurring. One way is to look for signs from the victim. Below is a list of common red flags you may notice with an individual experiencing abuse.

- Unexplained injuries (i.e., random bruises or broken bones)
- Changes in behavior and social activities (depression, withdrawal, missing family events)
- Changes in living arrangements that seem unusual (previously estranged relatives moving in, etc.)
- Changes in financial situations such as cancellation of services that are used regularly (television, internet, etc.)
- Restricted access to their own money
- Being poorly cared for by caregiver or major change in appearance (well-kept to unwashed)

Another way to identify abuse is to look for certain characteristics displayed by the abuser. Below is a list of common red flags you may notice from an abusive individual.

- Violent acts or aggressive tendencies (individual is very short tempered or reacts to simple statements)
- Attempts to limit an individual's ability to make their own choices
- Promoting isolation and limiting an individual's contact with support systems (refuses to let family or friends talk or visit)
- Disregarding a dependents privacy
- Attempts to read, or withhold mail and block visits and phone calls
- Acts to transfer will, bank accounts and other legal documents

Source: ([Government Of Canada, 2017](#))

For a complete list of red flags and more information on elder abuse, visit the following webpage: [How you can identify abuse and help older adults at risk.](#)

Anytime there is threat of immediate danger, call 911.

Taking Action



One of the hardest things to do is making a decision that may change your life. Remember, you are not alone, and help is available. If you are experiencing abuse and have decided it is time to take action, there are different levels of assistance you can seek. Below is a list of resources that offer counselling, housing supports, legal aid and contacting law enforcement.

It is important that you think about a safety plan and what your desired outcomes are. This will inform who is best to contact.

Canada Public Health advises, “If you decide to call a helpline or an organization and you can’t get through or the person you talk to isn’t helpful—don’t give up, try again” ([PHAC, 2012](#)).

It might take time to establish a connection that feels right. With perseverance, it is likely that you will find the type of help that fits your specific situation.

For General Information and Supports:

211: Local Human Service, and social assistance programs
(available 24/7 in 150 languages)

311: Municipal Support and Services

811: Health Support (available 24/7)

Dufferin/Caledon Community Support Line

Assistance navigating our local health and social care options.

P: 1-844-806-3093

Website: www.hillsofheadwaterscollaborative.ca

Email: info@hillsofheadwaterscollaborative.ca

Caledon \ Dufferin Victim Services

Offering support for victims of crime, abuse, crisis and tragedy in the Caledon and Dufferin communities.

(24 hour crisis line): 905-951-3838

Orangeville: 519-942-1452 or 1-888-743-6496 (toll-free)

Caledon East: 905-951-3838 or 1-888-743-6496 (toll-free)

Website: www.cdvs.ca/need-help | Email: info@cdvs.ca

Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Peel Dufferin

Telephone support for anyone living in the Peel Dufferin area experiencing crisis or mental illness.

(24 hour crisis line): 905-278-9036, or 1-888-811-2222 (toll-free)

P: 905-451-2123

Website: www.cmhapeeldufferin.ca/programs/24-7-crisis-support-peel/

Email: info@cmhapeel.ca

Supports for those in Long Term Care or Retirement Home Setting:

Long-Term Care Family Support and Action Line

Ontario Government phone line for reporting problems concerns or complaints about a publicly funded long term care home.

P: 1-866-434-0144

Website: www.ontario.ca/page/long-term-care-home-complaint-process

Retirement Home Regulatory Authority

Government mandated not-for-profit responding to reports of harm, or risk regarding an Ontario retirement home.

Toll free: 1-855-275-7472 (info and reporting line)

Website: www.rhra.ca/en/contact-us/ | Email: info@rhra.ca

If you or someone you know needs support, please reach out to any of the following resources. If you or someone you know are in immediate danger, please call 911.

Supports for Reporting Crime:

Crime Stoppers

A not-for-profit organization that allows people who have witnessed or become aware of a crime to report it anonymously. Crime stoppers will bring tips to law enforcement, so your identity and involvement are never recorded or revealed.

P: 1-800-222-TIPS (8477) (reporting line.)

Website: www.crimestoppers.ca

Police Non-Emergency

An official police line that responds to concerns that do not require immediate attention such as crimes that have already occurred.

P: 1-888-310-1122 (non-emergency number) | 1 888 310-1133

(non-emergency TTY) | 705 329-6111 (general inquiries).

Website: www.caledon.ca/opp | www.orangeville.ca/en/living-here/police

Housing Supports for Individuals Experiencing Domestic Violence:

Family Transition Place

Provides shelter, counselling, and outreach to women experiencing gender based violence

Get in touch.

24 Hour Support Line: 1-800-265-9178

P: 519-941-HELP (4357) | 905-584-HELP (4357)

Website: www.familytransitionplace.ca | Email: support@familytransitionplace.ca

Peel Emergency Shelters

If you need an immediate place to stay there are shelters available for youth, families, adults, and people fleeing violence or abuse.

P: 905-450-1996

Website: www.peelregion.ca/housing/shelters

Resources for Legal Aid:

Ontario Legal Aid

Provides a variety of legal services, counselling and representation for low income Ontario residents.

P: 1-800-668-8258

Website: www.legalaid.on.ca | Email: info@lao.on.ca

Advocacy Centre for the Elderly

Offering legal advice, brief legal services, referrals, and legal representation for low income seniors age 60+ in or near the GTA.

P: 416-598-2656 | 1-855-598-2656 (toll-free)

Website: www.ancelaw.ca

Resources for Frauds and Scams:

Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre

Website provides up to date lists and details of current scams effecting Canadians as well as ways to protect yourself. Online or phone options for reporting available.

P: 1-888-495-8501

Website: www.antifraudcentre-centreantifraude.ca

Want to keep active?

For more information on keeping active, staying connected and learning about the multitude of older adult services available in the Caledon and Dufferin area, please visit www.caledon.ca/adult55 or www.awicd.org

Resources for Caregivers



The latest research suggests that the majority of working Canadians aged 45 and older will become an unpaid caregiver at some point in the next 30 years. In addition, it is predicted that Canadians will have 30% less family members available for support ([National Seniors Strategy, 2020](#)). This means more duty will fall on less people, creating dangerous imbalances of demand.

The Ontario Caregiver Organization states that while many unpaid caregivers are new to the role, many of them are at a breaking point. Unfortunately, many cases of elder abuse may be the result of improperly managed burnout or stress. It is crucial to ensure that caregivers are supported so they can properly look after the individuals they are caring for.

If you are a caregiver and you feel that you may be overwhelmed, helpless, burnt out or on the brink of collapse, please don't hesitate to utilize the resources provided.

An unpaid caregiver (sometimes called an informal caregiver) is a family member, friend or neighbour that is involved in assisting others with activities of daily living and/or other medical tasks.

Ontario Caregiver Organization

Working to support caregiver success through online information sharing, education, and resources. This is not a crisis line. It is designed for caregivers in Ontario who are in need of support services or information for themselves or the person they care for. Online chat option is also available through the website.

P: 1-833-416-2273 (CARE)

Website: www.ontariocaregiver.ca

Self-Care for Caregivers

A Public Health resource from the Government of Canada providing information on caregiver self-care and burn out.

EAPO Caregiving Workshop Guide

A comprehensive guide promoting caregiver mental health through information, resources, and self-assessment tools.

Caregivers in the Hills

A local Caregiver support program for Caledon/Dufferin residents. Program includes navigational help and a ID badge to help caregivers better support their loved ones.

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Age-Friendly Caledon adult55@caledon.ca

Alternate Formats Available Upon Request.