



Keeping adults
safe from abuse is
everyone's business

To help someone who is being
harmed, call **0345 155 1007**

**Say no
to abuse**

Information for professionals

Introduction

This leaflet is about adult abuse and what you can do if you are worried that you, or someone you know, may be at risk of harm.

We all have the right to live in a safe environment where we are not abused or neglected. Organisations in Devon work together to help people stay safe, to prevent abuse happening and to reduce the harm where it does occur.

What is abuse?

Abuse is when someone treats you in a way that harms, hurts or exploits you. It happens when someone has power over you and you do not agree to what they are doing to you.

Abuse can take many forms. It can range from someone shouting at you in a way that undermines your confidence and frightens you, to causing you physical pain, suffering and even death. Abuse can happen just once or many times, and can affect other people too. It can be done on purpose or by someone who may not realise they are doing it.

The harm may happen anywhere – at home, in a public place, in a hospital, a care home or at a day centre.

The different types of abuse

Physical

Hitting, smacking, pushing, shaking, spitting, or other physical harm.

Domestic abuse

Controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour or violence between people who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members. It can include psychological, physical, sexual or financial abuse, so called 'honour' based violence or forced marriage.

Sexual

Any sexual activity where a vulnerable adult cannot or does not consent.

Financial or material

Fraud, theft or using a vulnerable adult's property without their permission.

Psychological

Shouting or swearing at or ignoring an adult, or using insulting language about their age, ethnicity, culture, sexuality, gender or disability.

Modern slavery

Slavery, human trafficking, forced labour and domestic servitude, where people are forced into a life of abuse, servitude and inhumane treatment.

Discriminatory

Suffering insulting language, harassment or ill-treatment because of age, ethnicity, culture, religion, language, sexuality, gender or disability.

Neglect

Where a person allows a vulnerable adult to suffer by failing to care for them or by ignoring their needs, for example with regard to food, visual or hearing needs.

Self-neglect

Someone may not be, for example, taking care of their personal hygiene, health or surroundings. It can include the collecting of a large number of items with little value to others (e.g. newspapers) that make it difficult to live in their home and increase the risk of fire – this is known as 'hoarding'.

Organisational

Repeated poor care of an adult at risk through neglect or poor professional practice in a paid or regulated care setting such as a hospital, a care home or an organisation paid to support you in your own home.

Who do we mean when we say 'adult at risk of abuse'?

If you are an adult at risk of abuse, that means you are someone aged 18 or over who needs care and support and you are unable to protect yourself from abuse or neglect. You may be at risk of abuse or already experiencing it.

There are a range of care and support needs that might mean people are unable to protect themselves from abuse or neglect, including age-related frailty, a visual or hearing impairment, physical disability or ill-health, learning disability, mental health problems, substance misuse or because they are providing care for someone else. It doesn't matter whether or not an organisation is providing services to meet your care and support needs – we will still help you to stay safe from abuse.

Which people might abuse an adult at risk?

Anyone can behave in a way that is abusive. A stranger may be the abuser, but an abuser is more likely to be someone you know, such as:

- family members
- professional staff
- paid or voluntary workers
- friends
- young people
- carers
- other adults with care and support needs.

What are the signs of abuse?

If someone is at risk of or is being abused, you might see one or a combination of the following signs:

- multiple bruising or fingermarks;
- injuries they cannot give a realistic explanation for;
- worsening health or weight loss for no obvious reason;
- inappropriate, dirty or inadequate clothing;
- mood changes or they become withdrawn;
- a carer who is unwilling to let others have contact with the person they care for;
- shortage of money for no apparent reason;
- neediness – someone being clingy and wanting affection;
- tearfulness and crying for no obvious reason and not saying why.

What should I do if I think someone is being abused?

Call **999** straight away if it is an emergency and the abuse is putting your own or someone's immediate safety at risk. You will need to consider whether the person has capacity.

Otherwise contact **Care Direct** on **0345 155 1007** or email: customerservicecentrecaredirectteam-mailbox@devon.gov.uk

Care Direct is open to take calls between 8am and 8pm Monday to Friday and from 9am to 1pm on Saturdays. Outside of these hours and on Sundays and Bank Holidays, in emergency only, please contact our Emergency Duty Service on **0845 6000 388** (low-call rate).

Safeguarding Adults Referral Form

A Safeguarding Adult referral can also be made to

Care Direct using the form on the link below:

<https://new.devon.gov.uk/devonsafeguardingadultsboard/reporting-concerns>

Do not be afraid to contact us.

An adult who cannot protect themselves may not be able to raise the alarm so it is important that you do – and make the abuse stop.

What not to do

Doing nothing is not an option. Don't ignore what is going on. Do not destroy, clean or wipe any evidence that might be used in an investigation.

Did you know?

Did you know it is a criminal offence to abuse an adult at risk who lacks capacity?

In 2005 the Mental Capacity Act was introduced and made it a criminal offence for anybody to ill-treat or wilfully neglect a person who lacks capacity to make relevant decisions. If a person is found guilty of such an offence under the Act, they could be sent to prison for up to five years, or receive a fine, or both.

What will happen if I report abuse?

If you report abuse:

- you will be asked to give details about the situation;
- if the adult is at risk of immediate or serious harm, action will be taken straight away to make sure they are safe. Organisations will work together to stop the abuse;
- in other cases, the action taken will depend on the wishes of the adult at risk and the seriousness of the situation;
- the first thing that will happen is trained staff will contact the person being abused. We will work together with the adult at risk carefully and sensitively to find out what they would like to happen, understand the different risks they are facing and agree how to deal with the situation. The adult at risk will be fully involved in all the stages of the Safeguarding process wherever possible;
- information and advice will be made available so the adult at risk can have choice and control over what action is taken and what help they want to have. We will work with them to put a plan in place to protect them, and we will provide help and advice to stop the abuse from happening again;
- if the adult at risk would have substantial difficulty in being involved in the safeguarding process, an appropriate person who can represent them or an independent advocate will be involved to make sure the adult's views and wishes are taken into account;
- if the adult at risk does not have the capacity to make an informed choice about how to stay safe, they will be carefully supported and protected in their best interests;
- where the abuse is thought to be a crime the police may take legal action against the abuser.

For more copies of this leaflet, or if you would like the leaflet in a different language or format, call **01392 38 3000** and ask for Devon Safeguarding Adults Board.

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