



Senior Services



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# Senior Safety Plan

**Raising Awareness of Elder Abuse on the Lower North Shore**

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## Introduction

Older adults who experience social isolation are at a significantly higher risk of experiencing elder abuse. Social isolation can be both a risk factor for, and a result of, elder abuse. As a risk factor, isolation heightens the importance of support networks and resources to support the health and wellbeing of the individual. As a result, when experiencing continuous abuse at the hands of someone you know or trust, the victim will often retreat into isolation due to feelings of fear and shame.

Older adults living on the Lower North Shore experience many challenges in terms of the geographically remote and isolated communities. Isolation has been an inevitable part of their lives. It has then been intensified by the loss of physical or mental capacity, or through the loss of friends and family members. Without adequate social support and inclusivity, older adults are at higher risks of living in vulnerable situations that encourage the use of power and control over their lives.

In an effort to raise awareness and provide guidance to older adults, more specially those living alone, that are in potentially vulnerable and abusive situations, the following Senior Safety Plan was developed.



## What is a Safety Plan for Seniors?

Everyone deserves to be treated with respect and dignity. All citizens of the Lower North Shore reserve the right to live safely in their own homes and manage their own affairs. The seniors in the region are no exception.

This Safety Plan for Seniors is a resource that outlines safe actions that older adults can take to increase their safety and well-being. It provides tips, strategies and resources that are available for seniors living on the Lower North Shore. This plan may also be utilized to prepare older adults for the possibility of violence, during, and after an abusive situation.

## Why is a Safety Plan for Seniors Important?

**Abusive situations are not always easy to identify. Simply put, a relationship becomes abusive when a set of behaviors is used by a person or persons, to establish dominance over another. An abusive person believes they have the right to control or restrict another person's life.**

For instance, an abusive partner or family member may not allow the older adult to make their own decisions about where they can go, who they can see, and how they wish to spend their money.

In developing a personal safety plan, an older adult can identify manipulative and controlling behaviors that may not be easy to identify. It can provide useful information and resources that encourage older adults to feel more confidence and control over their lives. Most importantly, it highlights how they can get help if needed.

First and foremost, when creating a safety plan, it is important to understand the different forms of elder abuse, to discuss steps in addressing abuse, and ensure the actions taken are practical, realistic, and with the older adults best interest at heart.



## Defining Elder Abuse

The most vulnerable amongst us can often be targets for abuse, manipulation, and harmful behaviors. Elder abuse is a major societal issue. It is an action, or at times an inaction, or a deliberate behavior, by a person(s) in a position of trust, such as an adult child, family member, friend or care giver. Abuse often causes:

- Physical, emotional or mental harm; and/or
- Damage to, or loss of, assets or property.

### **There are several kinds of elder abuse:**

1. Physical abuse
2. Psychological abuse
3. Financial abuse
4. Sexual abuse
5. Neglect

## PHYSICAL ABUSE

Physical abuse is the non-accidental use of physical force for coercion, or to inflict bodily harm.

### **Indicators of physical abuse include:**

- Pinching/Squeezing
- Pushing/Shoving/Restraining
- Jerking/Shaking/Pulling
- Shaking, causing bruising
- Slapping/Biting/Hair pulling
- Hitting/Punching/Kicking/Choking

### **Scenarios of Physical Abuse**

#### **Scenario #1**

Charlene arrived at the local CLSC with a broken collar-bone and cracked rib. The attending nurse assumed she had fallen, due to disorientation, or from being unsteady on her feet. In actuality, Charlene's husband, who had been abusive to her for sixty years, had pushed her down and stomped on her.

#### **Scenario #2**

Marie lives next door to Alice, a 70 year old local that she has known all her life. She hears Alice's daughter and son-in-law yelling constantly, followed by what she believes is the sound of someone falling. Marie is worried that Alice is being abused and sometimes sees her around town with bruises to the face or a black eye.



## PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE

Emotional abuse attacks a senior's feelings of self-worth or self-esteem. Use of verbal abuse by taunts, threats, put-downs, withdrawal of love and affection, or emotional support by the abuser, over a period of time, affects how a senior feels and is extremely harmful to his/her well-being.

### **Indicators of emotional and psychological abuse:**

- Jokes about habits/faults/age disabilities
- Insults about the senior
- Overly familiar, e.g., use of "dear" – not using name senior prefers
- Speaking to third party (acting as if the senior was not there)
- Treating senior as a child
- Not looking at person with hearing loss – treating this as a disability
- Ignoring the senior's feelings
- When placed in care facility – often choice of food, clothing, bathroom habits are removed
- Not keeping a promise
- Shouting, name calling
- Repeated/targeted insults

## Scenarios of Psychological Abuse

### Scenario #1

Johnny and June are emotionally upset. Their grandson, Hank, has moved in with them recently. Hank's wife has left him and he has lost his job, due to his excessive drinking. He has become very abusive to Johnny and June, often yelling at them, threatening them and demanding money. Hank is a big man, and becomes very aggressive when he drinks. Johnny and June are too frightened to ask him to leave and fear that he may become physically abusive to them if they don't give him the money he keeps asking for.

### Scenario #2

Lorraine, who has Alzheimer's, lives with her daughter, Sylvia. Sylvia has hired a caregiver to come in during the day to look after Lorraine. When Sylvia returns in the evening, Lorraine appears agitated and does not want Sylvia to come near her. Their neighbor tells Sylvia that they often hear the caregiver yelling at Lorraine and she frequently cries out. Sylvia discovers that the caregiver is emotionally abusive to Lorraine and threatens to hit her. They fire the caregiver and Lorraine quickly returns to her usual self.

## FINANCIAL

Financial abuse is damage to, or loss of assets or property. The abuser is usually a spouse or family member (often an adult child), caregiver, friend, or a trusted person in the senior's life.

Financial abuse is often accompanied by other forms of abuse, such as emotional abuse, physical abuse, or denial of rights. Three components are necessary for financial abuse to happen:

1. Need or Greed: the abuser is under financial pressure.
2. Opportunity: the abuser has access to funds or property.
3. False Sense of Entitlement: "I deserve it, I am owed."

### **Indicators of financial abuse:**

- Belief that seniors do not need money
- Theft of cash, credit cards, bank cards, mail
- Cashing in RRSP's without permission
- Using the senior's bank card to withdraw cash from the machine without their knowledge.
- Unpaid loans or repeated borrowing
- Using trickery or persuasion to get a senior's money or possessions
- Taking or withholding a senior's pension or insurance cheque
- Borrowing or taking a senior's possessions without permission
- Selling the senior's property or possessions without permission
- Forcing the senior to change his/her Will or give a Power of Attorney



## Scenarios of Financial Abuse

### Scenario #1

After obtaining a Power of Attorney from his grandfather, Robert began to sell some of his belongings. He promised his grandfather he would give him the money once the transactions were completed. Many months passed and Robert had not paid his grandfather. His grandfather asked Robert for the money several times, but did not receive it.

### Scenario #2

Linda frequently gives her adult son her pension cheque to be deposited into her account, asking him to bring back a specified amount of cash. While at the bank, her son uses his mother's pension cheque for payment to his overdue credit card. He did not have his mother's permission.

Sexual abuse is any kind of sexual interaction without full knowledge and consent.

It is any sort of unwanted touching, forcing a person to engage in or observe sexual activity that they have not consented to, or do not have the capacity to consent to.

### **Indicators of sexual abuse:**

- Jokes about a senior in her or his presence.
- Treating senior as a sex object.
- Sexual jokes about seniors.
- Not paying attention to his/ her, changing psychological needs.
- Minimizing his/her feelings and needs.
- Criticisms about a senior sexually.
- Uncomfortable or unwanted touching.
- Withholding sex/affection.

### **Sexual Abuse Scenarios**

#### **Scenario #1**

Betty, a widow of 87 years of age, suffering from dementia is living in a long-term care facility. One day, when a care aid was preparing her bath, Betty started to cry and pulled away from her, holding her nightgown as tight as possible. The nurse inspected further and discovered bruise marks over her body. When the nurses investigated, the lady in the next bed, also in stages of dementia, suddenly said, "He comes in here late at night and attacks us both!"

After further investigation, the staff discovered that during the night shift, a male care aide had been sexually abusing several of the residents who were suffering from dementia.

## NEGLECT

Neglect refers to the intentional withholding of basic necessities or care, or not providing basic necessities or care because of lack of experience, information, or ability.

### **Indicators of neglect:**

- Lack of attention
- Inadequate clothing
- Lack of hygiene
- Poorly maintained living environment
- Poor physical appearance
- Lack of food in cupboards
- Withholding nutrition/fluids
- Dehydration, malnutrition

### **Neglect Scenarios**

#### **Scenario #1**

Mr. Smith, who is bed-ridden, lives in a private care home and is not receiving good care. He requires assistance to dress and take care of his personal hygiene. He needs to be turned over in his bed on a regular basis, which is not happening. Mr. Smith has developed bed sores which are becoming ulcerous and require medical attention.



## Protecting Yourself From Abuse

If any of the situations of abuse that were listed above resonate with you, or you fear they may occur, there is one thing you must know:

### **ABUSE IS NOT YOUR FAULT**

Abuse can happen to anyone, of any age. It is important to stay active and be involved so you can develop an environment and network of friendships to support you.

Here are a few ways that you can protect yourself from an abusive relationship or situation:

- **CONNECTION**: Make sure to reach out to the people in your life that are supportive of you and respect your decisions. These are the people who always have your best interests at heart.
- **SENIOR ACTIVITIES**: Though it isn't always easy to get out and about, it is important to be involved in community groups or your local seniors club where you can participate in activities and events. Seniors Clubs often have information and resources available to you if you are dealing with an abusive situation.



## Protecting Yourself From Abuse

- **HAVE FUN:** Do the things that make you happy, that give you strength and comfort!
  - **PHYSICAL ACTIVITY:** Keep moving, and be sure to eat regular healthy meals.
  - **GET SUPPORT:** If you are feeling down, depressed, scared or alone, reach out to a trustworthy friend, faith leader or social service agency. You are not alone, there are resources available to help support you through a difficult time in your life.
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## Supporting Others in Abusive Situations

The following are strategies that can be discussed with older adults that are in, or may be exposed to, abusive situations.

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### **How to Support an Older Adult *Living in* an Abusive Situation**

**Prevention:** Prepare yourself for another abusive situation

- Speak with your neighbours and ask them to contact the police immediately if they hear yelling, or anything unusual,
- Always have an escape plan. Be sure to hide your keys, a cell phone, and have cash handy so you have an easy getaway.
- Make a list of the safe places you can go. This might even be a mental list so that in the moment, you already know exactly where you would go.



**Protection:** You are in a bad situation, here is what you can do to protect yourself at that moment.

- Get yourself to a room where you can use something as a weapon, if needed i.e., kitchen, workshop, etc.
- Immediately make your way to a room where you can lock the door from the inside of the room.
- If an argument begins, start to casually move yourself outside where neighbors can hear you.
- If you are being hurt, protect yourself by raising your arms to both sides of your head with your fingers interlocked.

**Notification:** Resources that you can rely on to call for help

- Call the police
- Have a list of numbers on hand of people that you can call to come help you immediately.

**Support:** It is not easy living in threatening situations, but there is help available

- Make your own personalized safety plan that you can reference in these situations
- Reach out to community organizations, like the Coasters Association, or your local Senior Wellness animator, for resources and support services that are available to you.



## How to Support an Older Adult *Thinking about Leaving* an Abusive Relationship

**Prevention:** Get things organized as you prepare your exit

- It is important to NOT tell your abuser that you are leaving or planning to leave, or planning to approach someone about their abuse. It could lead to an even more dangerous situation.
- Gather all legal and important documents, i.e., passport, health cards, banking information, tax information, health documents, etc.
- If you cannot hide these documents in your own home, consider asking someone you trust to make copies, or reach out to your local Senior Wellness Animator for copies. Give them to someone you trust for protection.

**Protection:** You are ready to exit, ensure you have a well laid out plan

- Move quickly, you are now organized so it is time to leave as fast as you can
- Ensure that you have a location planned where you can stay safely, if you have pets, ensure they are taken care of, clear your recents phone calls from your phone.
- Have a backup plan in case your abuser finds out where you are going.



**Notification:** You have left the situation, it is important to reach out to health care professionals or law enforcement to document your situation

- Take any photos of the evidence of physical violence, or
- Journal any acts of violence, especially psychologically or emotionally abusive situations
- Visit your CLSC or health center, and contact the Surete-du-Quebec (SQ) in Blanc-Sablon, so they can document the situation.

**Support:** Resources are available to you, you are not alone in this.

- Talk to your local Senior Wellness Animator for any local resources or online resources
  - Speak to your local nurse for more resources in the health care system
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# My Safety Plan

**The following steps are my plan to protect myself from an abusive situation. I do not deserve to be controlled or victimized. I reserve the right to protect myself from harm and to feel safe.**

I will leave personal information, money, important documents, extra keys, with (name and phone number):

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**When I sense abuse**, I will get myself to a safe room in the house, where I will have objects close to defend myself. I will try to move to the following place:

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**If I am escaping** an abusive situation, I will go to (friend, family member, etc.):

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**I can trust** that my pet(s) are safe in the short-term at the following location:

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**I feel safe** sharing the abuse with (name of person):

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Emergency numbers for my community:

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## **I will remember to:**

- Keep my purse or wallet, emergency cash and medications hidden in a safe place so that I can leave quickly.
- Keep my cell phone, phone calling card or coins for pay phones with me at all times.
- Review this safety plan regularly in order to plan the safety way to leave



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# Who Can I Trust?

Write the name and contact information for the people you can trust.

**NAME**

**NUMBER**

NAME	NUMBER

### Who Can I Call For Help?

#### Emergency:

- **Police Station Blanc-Sablon (SQ):** (418)-461-2162 or 310-4141
- **Hospital Blanc-Sablon:** (418) 461-2144

#### All Emergencies: 911

#### Medical:

- **Local CLSC:**
  - Kegaska Clinic: (418) 726-3382
  - La Romaine Clinic: (418) 229-2166
  - Chevery Clinic: (418) 787-2277
  - Harrington Harbour Clinic: (418) 795-3325
  - Tête-à-la-Baleine Clinic: (418) 242-2112
  - La Tabatière Clinic: (418) 773-2232
  - Saint-Augustin Clinic: (418) 947-2321
  - St. Paul's River Clinic: (418) 379-2244
- **Hospital Sept-Îles:** (418) 962-9761
- **Hospital Havre-Saint-Pierre:** (418) 538-2212
- **Uniprix Clinic Danielle Driscoll:** (418) 461-2727 or 1-844-990-4405
- **Info-Santé:** 811

### Who Can I Call For Help?

#### Crisis Help:

- **Crisis Centre:** 1-800-353-1143
- **SOS Spousal Abuse:** 1-800-363-9010
- **Quebec National Crisis Line:** 1-866-APPELLE (277-3553)
- **Elder Mistreatment Helpline:** 1-888-489-ABUS (2287)
- **Quebec Association for Suicide Prevention:** (418) 614-5909

#### Community Support:

- **Caregiver Helpline:** 1-855-852-7789
- **L'APPUI Côte-Nord:** (418) 589-4014
- **Alzheimer's Society:** 1-866-366-4673
- **PhoneBusters (Canadian Anti-fraud Call Center):** 1-888-495-8501
- **Coasters Association - St. Paul's River:** (418) 379-2006





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