

Protecting vulnerable adults from abuse

Hertfordshire County Council's Health and Community Services and all the agencies and organisations it works with are committed to preventing abuse of vulnerable adults. If someone is being abused, or is suspected of being abused, we will act promptly to stop the abuse.

This leaflet explains what to do if you have concerns about the possible abuse of a vulnerable adult.

Who is a vulnerable adult?

A vulnerable adult is a person aged 18 or over who may be unable to take care of themselves or is at risk of harm or serious exploitation. This may be because they have a mental health problem, a learning or physical disability, are old and frail or have an illness.

What is abuse?

Abuse is where someone in a position of trust hurts, harms or causes distress to a vulnerable person. Abuse is a violation of an individual's human and civil rights and can be committed by another person or persons. Abuse may consist of a single act or repeated actions directly or indirectly and can happen anywhere.

Abuse can be:

- **physical** – such as hitting, pushing, kicking, shaking, misusing medication, restraint
- **sexual** – such as rape, sexual assault, or sexual acts of any kind to which the vulnerable adult has not consented, or could not consent, or to which they were pressurised into consenting
- **psychological or emotional** – such as threats of harm or abandonment, being deprived of contact, humiliation, blaming, controlling, intimidation, harassment, verbal abuse, isolation or being prevented from receiving services or support
- **financial** – such as theft, fraud or exploitation, pressure in connection with wills, property, inheritance or financial transactions, misuse of property, possessions or benefits
- **institutional** abuse can sometimes happen in residential homes, nursing homes or hospitals where people are mistreated because of poor or inadequate care, neglect or poor working practices, including inadequate staffing
- **neglect** – such as ignoring physical or medical care needs, failure to provide access to health, social care or education, withholding the necessities of life such as food, drink, heating and medicines
- **discriminatory** – such as that based on someone's race, sexuality or disability or other forms of harassment or slurs

How do I know if someone is being abused?

There are a number of signs that someone might be experiencing abuse, neglect or mistreatment. You may have noticed changes in the vulnerable adult that cause concern, for example:

- **behaviour** – they may have become withdrawn, depressed or tearful. They may also be angry or aggressive for little or no reason
- **personal hygiene** – they may not be taking as much care as normal with their appearance, for example not bathing, shaving or washing their hair
- **lifestyle** – they may stop going out, not have money to access leisure services or food, not welcome visitors, not want to be left alone with certain people or seem to have lost their appetite
- **injuries** – any unexplained or frequent injuries

Vulnerable adults can be silent victims of abuse. People should not suffer in silence as help is available. Even if you're not sure that it is abuse, there are people who you can talk to about your concerns so that the person concerned can be protected and made safe.

If you are worried that someone is showing any of the above signs please tell someone – even if the person is not being abused, neglected or mistreated it is better to talk about your concerns.

Who can I talk to?

Abuse can happen anywhere and to anyone. If it is happening to you, do not be ashamed, frightened or worried – it is not your fault. Any abuse is wrong so if you are worried please tell someone.

We know that you may be worried about speaking to someone about what is happening to you, or someone you care for, but talking about it is better than letting it continue.

Contacting someone does not necessarily mean that you are making a complaint or an allegation of abuse. You may not always need to give your name.

If you are worried that someone you know is at risk of harm, neglect or mistreatment please call Health and Community Services in confidence to report your concerns on **0300 123 4042**.

If you are deaf or hard of hearing you can use our textphone number on **0300 123 4041**.

For further information on safeguarding adults please visit www.hertsdirect.org/caresupport/safe

This information can be made available on request in other formats, including large print, Braille, audio and other languages.