

# Staying in control when you're older

How to avoid being mistreated and what to do if it happens



## Thank you

Independent Age would like to thank those who shared their experiences as this guide was being developed, and those who reviewed the information for us.

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## Other formats

If you need this information in a different format (such as large print or audio CD), please contact us.

## Contact us

Call us on 0800 319 6789 or email [advice@independentage.org](mailto:advice@independentage.org)

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The sources used to create this publication are available on request.

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 Health & care  
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# About this guide

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Everyone has the right to live in safety, free from abuse and neglect. While you can usually trust those close to you – family, friends and carers – there may be times when they take advantage or mistreat you. It's important to remember you don't have to put up with this, no matter who is treating you badly or how minor you consider their actions. This guide shows you where you can go for help and what will happen after you report abuse.

# What is abuse?

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Abuse is when someone causes us harm or distress. Anyone can become a victim of abuse – it's no reflection of your intelligence, strength or worth. Abuse can take many forms ranging from disrespect to causing someone physical or mental pain. It can occur in someone's home, a hospital, a care home or a public place.

Often, the people who commit abuse are taking advantage of a special relationship. They may be a family member, friend or paid carer who we expected to trust. Sometimes abuse isn't intentional, but happens because someone doesn't have the skills or support needed to care for someone. This doesn't make the impact of it any less, but it can help to understand how it happened.

Abuse is never acceptable and you don't have to put up with it. There is help available to keep you safe and decide what action to take.

## 2 Different types of abuse

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Five common types of abuse are financial, psychological, physical, sexual and neglect. Someone may experience one or more types of abuse. If someone is mistreating you, it's important to speak up. The abuse isn't your fault and there is help available (see page 12).



### Financial abuse

Financial abuse is when someone steals or withholds money from you, or cons or pressures you into handing it over. This could be:

- someone taking your money or valuables without permission

- someone who looks after your money on your behalf using the money inappropriately or persuading you to spend it in a way you don't want to
- being pressurised to change your will or sign your property over to someone.



## Psychological abuse

Psychological abuse is when someone deliberately upsets you by threatening or humiliating you, for example, in a way that chips away at your self-worth and independence.

This could be:

- someone calling you names
- someone threatening to harm or leave you
- someone not allowing you to see people you want to see, such as grandchildren

- someone humiliating, blaming or controlling you
- being prevented from taking part in social, religious or cultural activities
- being ignored when you need help.

It doesn't leave physical marks but can be very harmful – and can have longer-lasting effects than physical abuse.

## Physical abuse

If someone uses force that causes pain, injury or a change in your physical health, this is physical abuse. It could be:

- someone hitting, slapping or pushing you, or handling you roughly
- not being given the right dose of medication
- being inappropriately restrained
- someone making a room too hot or cold, or making you wear too many or too few clothes.

## Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse includes someone touching or looking at you inappropriately, assaulting you, exposing themselves to you or making you undress or look at sexual images. People are less

likely to report it than other types of abuse as they may feel ashamed or embarrassed.

## Neglect

Neglecting someone can be deliberate or not. It is when a carer fails to meet your basic needs so you may be left hungry, in pain or cold, for example.

# 3 Who is at risk of abuse?

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While any of us could experience abuse, certain people are more at risk. This includes people who:

- are isolated and have little contact with family or friends
- have memory problems or difficulty communicating
- don't get on with their carer
- misuse drugs or alcohol, or have a carer who misuses them.



# How to protect yourself

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Having mental capacity means you have the ability to understand, retain and weigh up the information needed to make or communicate a decision. Someone who lacks mental capacity – because of advanced dementia, a stroke or because they're unconscious, for example – will need someone else to make decisions for them.

People who lack mental capacity may be affected in different ways.

- They may lack capacity to make some decisions for themselves but be able to make others. For example, Jenny has dementia which means she can decide what to eat and what to wear, but can't make decisions about investing her money or selling her home.
- They may be unable to make a decision at a certain time, but be fine at other times. For example, David takes medication which makes him groggy and confused in the evenings, but he is fine in the mornings.
- They may be unable to make any decisions about themselves at any time. For example, Arjun has advanced dementia and is no longer

able to make decisions for himself. He must rely on others he trusts to do so for him.

It's important to know someone you trust will make decisions on your behalf, if there comes a time when you're unable to. There are a number of ways to do this.

## Set up a lasting power of attorney (LPA)

A lasting power of attorney is a legal document that gives someone you trust (the attorney) the right to make decisions about your money or welfare on your behalf. It can give you peace of mind to know you've protected yourself if there comes a time when you don't have mental capacity.

There are two types of lasting power of attorney.

- A property and financial affairs LPA lets someone make decisions about your finances. If you want, this can be used while you still have mental capacity.
- A health and welfare LPA lets someone make decisions about your healthcare and your personal welfare.

You can let your attorney make all decisions on your behalf or restrict them to certain tasks. For example, you could say your attorney can have access to your bank account and pay your bills, but can't make decisions about selling your home.

Think carefully about who you choose as your attorney. You must be able to trust them completely to make the right decisions for you.

Contact the Office of the Public Guardian (**0300 456 0300**, [gov.uk/office-of-public-guardian](https://www.gov.uk/office-of-public-guardian)) to find out more about creating an LPA.

## Set up an advance decision to refuse treatment

An advance decision is a way to refuse certain types of treatment or care if there comes a time when you lose mental capacity. You may have heard this called a 'living will'. It's a legally binding document so must be followed by healthcare professionals looking after you.

See our free factsheet **Managing my affairs if I become ill** to find out more about setting up an LPA or an advance decision (**0800 319 6789**, [independentage.org](https://www.independentage.org)).

# 5 How to get help if you're experiencing abuse

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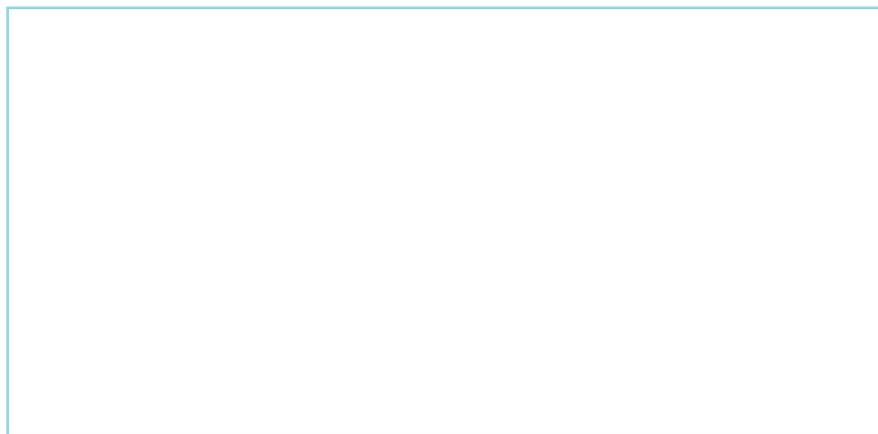
If someone is mistreating you, it's important you speak out to stop it. Any kind of abuse is unacceptable, no matter how minor you may feel it is. You have the right to be treated with respect.

Start by talking to family or friends you trust, or your GP, social worker or local social services.



This may feel difficult, but it's the best way to start getting the help and support you deserve. To report abuse, contact your local council's

adult social care team (also called social services). Many councils have a dedicated number that can be called to raise concerns about a vulnerable adult at risk of abuse or neglect. You can find this in the phone book or on the council's website. Write it down here:



If you've been physically hurt or you need immediate protection from someone, dial 999 for the police and/or an ambulance. If you feel a crime has been committed, you can also report your concerns to the police. You can speak to your local police force by calling **101**. For confidential advice on reporting abuse, contact Action on Elder Abuse (**0808 808 8141**, [elderabuse.org.uk](http://elderabuse.org.uk)).

## 6 What happens after you report abuse

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After you speak to your adult social care team, a social worker will discuss ways to resolve the situation. They will start a safeguarding enquiry if you are still at risk of abuse. This could range from a conversation through to a more formal course of action involving different agencies. If the abuse is more serious, the police may be involved. Your views and wishes should be taken into account at every step.



The outcome of the enquiry will depend on how serious the abuse is. A plan of action should be recorded on your care plan, stating:

- how you will be kept safe in future
- any support, treatment or help you will be given
- any changes needed to the care you receive
- how you will be supported through any action you plan to take to seek justice.

If a crime has been committed, the adult social care team should tell the police, who will carry out an investigation. They will decide whether or not to charge the abuser with any criminal offence.

# Our free advice guides

Our practical, jargon-free advice guides give you the information you need to get the most out of older age.



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**To order your free advice guides, call  
0800 319 6789 or visit [independentage.org](http://independentage.org)**

The information in this guide applies to England only.

If you're in Wales, contact Age Cymru (0800 022 3444, [agecymru.org.uk](http://agecymru.org.uk)) for information and advice.

In Scotland, contact Age Scotland (0800 12 44 222, [agescotland.org.uk](http://agescotland.org.uk)).

In Northern Ireland, contact Age NI (0808 808 7575, [ageni.org](http://ageni.org)).

We want the UK to be the best place to grow older and we have ambitious targets to increase the number of older people we help and the difference we make. We receive no state funding and rely on income from individuals, trusts and other sources to continue providing our services to hundreds of thousands of older people in need.

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A charity founded over 150 years ago, we're independent so you can be.

For more information, visit our website **[independentage.org](http://independentage.org)**

Call us for information or to arrange free, impartial advice from an expert adviser. Lines are open 8am-8pm, Monday to Friday, and 9am-5pm, Saturday and Sunday. Freephone **0800 319 6789** or email **[advice@independentage.org](mailto:advice@independentage.org)**



advice and support for older age

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