

Worried an older person is being abused?



Who we are

Age Scotland is the national charity for older people. We work to improve the lives of everyone over the age of 50 so that they can love later life.

Our vision is for Scotland to be the best place in the world to grow older.

Our mission is to inspire, involve and empower older people in Scotland, and influence others, so that people can make the most of later life.

Our three strategic aims are to:



Help older people to be as well as they can be



Promote a positive view of ageing and later life



Tackle loneliness and isolation

How we can help

We know that growing older doesn't come with a manual. Later life can bring changes and opportunities to your life and you may need to know about rights, organisations and services which are unfamiliar to you.

That's why we provide free information and advice to help you on a range of topics including benefits and entitlements, social care, legal issues such as Power of Attorney, housing and much more. All of our guides are available to download for free from our website, or you can contact our helpline team to have copies posted to you for free.

The Age Scotland **helpline** is a free, confidential phone service for older people, their carers and families in Scotland looking for information and advice.

Later life can bring times when you just need someone to talk to. Our **friendship line** is part of our wider helpline and older people can call us for a chat. We're here to listen, provide friendship and offer support.

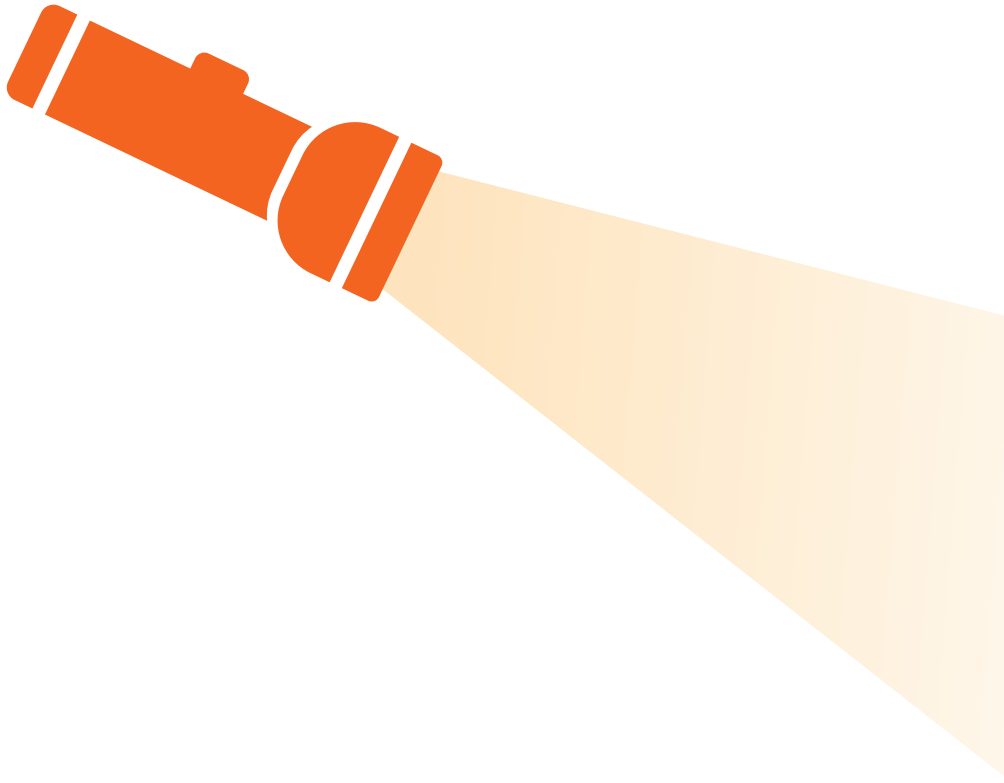
For information, advice and friendship



Call us free on: 0800 12 44 222
(Monday – Friday, 9am - 5pm)



Visit [agescotland.org.uk](https://www.agescotland.org.uk)
to find out more.



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Please note that the inclusion of named agencies, websites, companies, products, services or publications in this information guide does not constitute a recommendation or endorsement by Age Scotland or any of its subsidiary companies or charities.

Are you worried that someone is being abused, harmed or neglected?

Introduction

Some older people in Scotland experience abuse, harm and neglect. They are abused by people they thought they could trust in places where they should be safe.

Anyone can be at risk of abuse, but older people can be particularly vulnerable if they need to depend on others, are frail, have health problems or problems with thinking or memory.

People can also be at risk if they are isolated from the friends, family and services that normally support them.

This booklet provides information on different types of abuse, why it can be difficult for someone to get help and what you can do to help them. We use the word abuse in this guide to mean abuse, harm and neglect.



What is abuse?

The **World Health Organisation** defines abuse of older people as:

“a single or repeated act or lack of appropriate action occurring within any relationship in which there is expectation of trust that causes harm or distress to an older person.”

Abuse can take many forms and might include:

- **Physical abuse** - physical force, hitting, pushing, rough handling, force-feeding, improper administration of medication, misuse of restraint.
- **Sexual abuse** - forcing someone to take part in any sexual activity without their consent, including intentional touching, sexual assault, rape, sexual harassment and use of sexual language.
- **Financial abuse** - stealing money or possessions, having control over someone's money, fraud or forgery. Financial abuse can also involve putting pressure on people to make financial decisions they would not otherwise make about things like Wills, gifts, property or Power of Attorney.
- **Emotional, psychological or mental abuse** - bullying, threatening, persistently ignoring, intimidating, humiliating. It can also include depriving someone of their right to make everyday decisions, and choice about who they spend time with.
- **Neglecting an older person**, or denying their basic needs such as help with going to the toilet, eating, getting dressed, medical and social needs.
- **Discriminatory abuse** - such as unfavourable treatment because of a person's age, ethnicity or sexuality.
- **Institutional abuse** - poor processes or treatment in institutions such as care homes or hospitals.

Spotting the signs of abuse

The symptoms of abuse are different for different people and different types of abuse. Signs can include:

- changes in behaviour, including aggression, anger or depression
- anxiety or withdrawal
- not wanting to be left alone with someone
- difficulty in getting access to the older person
- unexplained or repeated injuries or falls
- unexplained difficulty sitting or walking
- deterioration in appearance or personal hygiene
- inadequate food, drink or medical care
- lack of money for basic necessities, or unexplained withdrawals from their bank account.



Why might someone be reluctant to seek help?

Talking about abuse and asking for help can be difficult, but it is even harder if an older person is reluctant to speak up because they are being abused by someone they are close to. They may be:

- concerned that a family member or carer will get into trouble
- worried they will be left on their own and lonely if they report the abuser (their partner may leave them, or they may be denied access to grandchildren, family or friends may treat them differently)
- embarrassed, or concerned that others may find out
- feeling that they are a burden and the abuse is somehow their fault
- dependent on the abuser for care, money or emotional support,
- worried that the abuse will get worse
- unable to find the words to explain what is happening to them
- unaware of the services, support or care which could help them
- fearful that other options could be worse than their current abuse or neglect
- lacking the information to make a decision about their options.

Someone who is being abused may not want to talk to someone they know well, but may be more comfortable talking to an agency, such as Age Scotland or Hourglass where they do not have to give their name and can speak to someone they will never meet. Others may have a trusting relationship with a GP, religious leader or carer who could report the abuse for them or support them to report the abuse themselves.

If someone depends on their abuser for care, asking the local social work department for a care needs assessment may enable them to have their care needs met in another way.



What to do if you think an older person is being abused

Many people are cautious about getting too involved in the lives of their friends and neighbours, but some people who have been abused are unable to get help for themselves and so rely on the people around them to raise concerns.

If you believe that someone is being abused, think carefully about what you can realistically and safely do to help. Get advice for yourself from **Hourglass** or the **Age Scotland** helpline.

You might be able to support the older person yourself, or you could contact the local council or police if you feel that someone is at risk or if you think a crime has been committed.

If you think someone is being abused, you may be able to:

Talk to them - try to talk in a safe and private place. Tell them why you are concerned, you don't have to accuse anyone of anything.

Listen to them - be aware that they may deny that there is a problem or not recognise that they are being abused.

Respect their privacy and wishes - do not discuss the subject with or challenge the abuser, especially if the older person doesn't want you to.

If they have granted someone **Power of Attorney** let the attorney know of your concerns unless they are the abuser. If the attorney is the abuser, get advice.

Get advice - for advice for yourself or the person who you think is being abused you can contact:

Age Scotland helpline

0800 12 44 222

www.agescotland.org.uk

Hourglass (the new name for Action on Elder Abuse)

080 8808 8141

<https://wearehourglass.scot/scotland>

These helplines can give you advice on your options including legal measures which may help such as Power of Attorney, and the duty of the council's social work department to support and protect older people who are vulnerable.

Even if the older person does not want to seek help just now, it may still be useful for them to know about their options if they want to seek help in future.



Seeking support or protection

If you think someone is experiencing serious abuse, or they are in immediate physical danger, you should contact the emergency services straight away on **999**.

If the risk is not immediate, you could contact the local social work department; if the person you are concerned about is classed as an 'adult at risk of harm' their council's social work department has specific responsibilities and powers to help them.

An 'adult at risk of harm' is someone who:

- is unable to look after their own well-being, property, rights or other interests, and
- is at risk of harm because of their own actions or someone else's actions, and also
- has a disability, mental disorder, illness or physical or mental infirmity, which means they are more vulnerable to being harmed than other adults.

Once the council knows that someone may be at risk, they might investigate what is going on. During and after the investigation they may take steps to consult the victim about what they want, take steps to keep them safe, arrange support or take steps to protect them from the abuser.

If the abuser is a paid carer or healthcare worker you could report them to the organisation which regulates their profession; Hourglass or the Age Scotland helpline can help you to find contact details of the relevant agency and complaints procedures.

Who can help?

Age Scotland helpline: 0800 12 44 222

The Age Scotland helpline provides information, friendship and advice to older people, their relatives and carers.

If you need an interpreter call **0800 12 44 222** and simply state the language you need e.g. Polish or Urdu. Stay on the line for a few minutes and the Age Scotland helpline will do the rest.

You can call us for a copy of our publications list or download / order copies from our website at **www.agescotland.org.uk**.

Hourglass helpline: 0808 808 8141

Hourglass is a charity that focuses on the issue of abuse of older people. If you phone this number it will not appear on your telephone bill.

<https://wearehourglass.scot/scotland>

Citizens Advice Bureau

You can call Scotland's Citizens Advice Helpline for advice, or for details of your local bureau or see their website.

0800 028 1456

www.citizensadvice.org.uk/scotland/about-us/get-advice-s/

How you can help

Our vision is a Scotland where everyone can love later life.

All the information and advice we provide is free and completely impartial and in helping people access their rights and entitlements, it can be life changing.

We are an ageing population and more people than ever are coming to us for support. You can help us be there for those that need us most.



Make a donation

No matter how small or large, donations make a massive difference and help us continue our important work.

- ▶ Call **03330 15 14 60**
- ▶ Visit **age.scot/donate**
- ▶ Text **LATERLIFE** to **70085** to donate £5.*



Fundraise

Whether it is having a bake sale, running a marathon or knitting small hats for the Big Knit, there are so many ways to raise vital funds to support our work. To find out more, call **0333 323 2400** or visit **age.scot/fundraise**.



Leave us a gift in your Will

By choosing to leave us a gift in your Will, you can help Age Scotland to continue being there for vulnerable older people in the years to come. To find out more, call **0333 323 2400** or visit **age.scot/legacy**.

* Texts cost £5 plus one standard rate message

Let's keep in touch



Sign up to our newsletter

Our regular newsletters by email contain details of our campaigns, services and how you can support our work.

Sign up today by visiting [**age.scot/roundup**](https://age.scot/roundup)



Follow us on social media

Our social media channels are a great way to keep up to date with our work and issues that affect older people.



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Contact us:

Head office

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Email

info@agescotland.org.uk

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