



## **Safeguarding: A Short Guide**

Independent Age has Safeguarding Policy and Procedures in place, which aim to protect the older people we support from avoidable harm. These state that all staff and volunteers have a key role to play in preventing harm or abuse from occurring, and in taking action when concerns arise.

### **What is safeguarding?**

Government guidance defines safeguarding as: "Protecting an adult's right to live in safety, free from abuse and neglect." Safeguarding aims to:

- stop abuse and neglect where possible
- prevent harm from happening in the first place, and reduce the risk of neglect to adults.

### **What is abuse?**

Abuse is when someone causes harm or distress to another person. It can:

- Be a single act or repeated acts
- Affect one or more people
- Be carried out by anyone including family members, friends, professionals and strangers.

The different types of abuse are:

Physical abuse	Modern slavery
Domestic violence	Discriminatory abuse
Sexual abuse	Organisational abuse
Psychological abuse	Neglect and acts of omission
Financial or material abuse	Self-neglect

For more information about each type of abuse, please refer to your safeguarding training materials. Training materials can be found online [here](#) or you can ask the volunteering team to post you a copy calling 020 7605 4255 or by email on [volunteering@independentage.org](mailto:volunteering@independentage.org).

### **Key signs and indicators of abuse**

An older person may tell you that they are:

- frightened or stressed,
- are having difficulty sleeping, or/ and
- are feeling depressed

You may also notice unexplained changes in their behaviour – they could be unusually quiet or talkative, or seem distracted or irritable, for example. You could pick up on changes in their appearance, such as not wearing clean clothes or taking the pride in the way they look that they usually would. Also, changes in their environment such as the house being much untidier than usual, the disappearance of possessions or an unexplained shortage of money can be signs that abuse is taking place.

## **If you are told about abuse**

- Stay calm and listen carefully, being empathetic and sensitive
- Let the person know:
  - They did the right thing to tell you – abuse is never acceptable and they don't have to put up with it, however minor they think it is
  - You are treating the information seriously
  - You will have to share the information within the organisation, even if they don't want you to tell anyone. This doesn't necessarily mean that any further action will be taken, but as a volunteer for Independent Age, you have a responsibility to share your concerns with your Independent Age contact.
- Share the information with your Independent Age contact following the guidelines set out below
- Record what you were told as soon as possible
- Ensure you follow Data Protection guidelines and destroy all notes once you have shared the information with your Independent Age contact.

Remember: don't be afraid of being wrong, or about sharing the information with your Independent Age contact/ Out of Hours support (details below).

## **Things to avoid**

- Asking intrusive or leading questions
- Being judgemental
- Promising to keep something secret
- Putting words into the person's mouth or assume how they feel
- **Avoid** under all circumstances **contacting the alleged abuser**

And remember, follow data protection guidelines and never discuss it with those who don't need to know.

## **If you need to find out more**

Remember that it is not your role to investigate allegations of abuse – you only need to find out enough information so that you are clear about the concerns raised by the older person and you can share them with your Independent Age contact.

If you do need to gather more information from someone, or you are worried that someone is being abused but they have not mentioned that anything is wrong, it is important to have a conversation with them about it as soon as possible. Waiting until there's a crisis and you have to act quickly can mean making decisions under pressure, which may not always lead to the best result for the person concerned.

You may want to speak to your Independent Age contact beforehand to get advice about what further information they need from you.

It is more likely that someone will tell you about a potentially abusive situation than that you will identify an issue that you need to start a conversation about. However, if this does happen:

- Prepare what to say in advance – practise, if necessary. Explain why you are worried, giving examples of things you have noticed. Reassure them that they can get help if there is anything wrong
- Make sure that you both have enough time for the conversation, and that you won't be disturbed. Keep your body language relaxed, and maintain eye contact as far as possible
- Don't be afraid of silence – they may need time to reflect. If they refuse to talk or seem angry, you might want to leave the conversation and come back to it later. However, this won't be appropriate if the person is at immediate risk of harm.

### **Sharing the information**

- **If the older person is at immediate risk**, for example if there is a medical emergency or if you witness serious abuse or a theft being committed, contact emergency services and inform your Independent Age contact as soon as possible afterwards
- The main and first point of contact is your Independent Age contact
- If they are unavailable, contact the **Out of Hours Support** number on 020 7605 4455
- Document the incident: be brief, factual and relevant.

### **What to record**

All incidents should be recorded in writing, dated and signed within 24 hours.

You should:

- Be accurate and descriptive: do not make any assumptions
- Be clear and concise
- Record times, dates and people
- Record exact words used
- Distinguish between fact and opinion.

### **After you have shared information about abuse**

- Your Independent Age contact will inform you of the outcome, where possible
- You may be contacted for further information.

The Independent Age Safeguarding Policy and Procedures have more detailed information on all aspects of safeguarding. You can access it in your [Welcome Pack](#). We also have a useful "[Staying in control when you're older](#)" guide on our website, which anyone can order for free.