

# Responding to signs of abuse and neglect

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Recognising the possible signs of abuse and neglect is complex and there is no simple checklist that can be followed. However, being aware of possible indicators of abuse means you can support someone if you are concerned. You may become concerned about a person if you notice they:

- have become quieter, withdrawn from usual activities, contacts or communication, or is reluctant to talk openly
- have lost weight or appear malnourished
- seem to be struggling with money or have no money available or is making unusual withdrawals
- have cuts, bruises or injuries that can't be explained
- have radically changed behaviour
- have significantly changed sleeping patterns
- are worried or anxious for no obvious reason
- appear afraid of a particular person/caregiver or avoids physical, eye or speech communication with them
- are irritable, have shaking, trembling or crying attacks or are easily upset
- present as helpless, hopeless or sad
- have a rigid posture
- make contradictory statements not associated with mental confusion
- wait for others to answer rather than answer for themselves
- recoil from touch

These are only possible indicators. They do not confirm that a person is being abused or neglected.

## Diocesan Safety Team

The Diocesan Safety Team is led by Roger Wigglesworth. The team can be contacted at [safety@anglicanmovement.nz](mailto:safety@anglicanmovement.nz). You can also call Roger on 021 541 618, or email [roger@anglicanmovement.nz](mailto:roger@anglicanmovement.nz).

## Signs and symptoms of possible abuse and neglect

*Caution: These factors may raise suspicion of abuse but are not diagnostic. Avoid jumping to conclusions. The whole situation needs to be taken into account.*

### Physical abuse

- bruises, black eyes, welts, lacerations, cigarette burns, and rope marks
- bone fractures, broken bones, missing teeth and skull fractures
- open wounds, cuts, punctures, untreated injuries in various stages of healing
- sprains, dislocations, and internal injuries/bleeding
- broken eyeglasses/frames, physical signs of being subjected to punishment, and signs of being restrained
- laboratory findings of medication overdose or under-utilization of prescribed drugs
- person's report of being hit, slapped, kicked, or mistreated
- sudden significant changes in behavior
- a caregiver's refusal to allow visitors to see person alone

### Emotional or psychological abuse

- being emotionally upset or agitated or angry
- being extremely withdrawn and non-communicative or non-responsive
- unusual behavior (e.g., sucking, biting, rocking)
- person's report of being verbally or emotionally mistreated
- insomnia
- feelings of resignation, fear, shame, depression or mental confusion

### Sexual abuse

- bruises around the breasts or genital area
- unexplained venereal disease or genital infections
- unexplained vaginal or anal bleeding
- torn, stained, or bloody underclothing
- a person's report of being sexually assaulted or raped

### Domestic abuse

See indicators of physical, sexual and emotion abuse above and also:

- desertion at a hospital, a nursing facility, or other similar institution
- desertion at a shopping center or other public location
- a person's own report of being abandoned

## Financial abuse

- sudden changes in bank account or banking practice, including an unexplained withdrawal of large sums of money by a person accompanying the person
- the inclusion of additional names on a person's bank signature card
- unauthorized withdrawal of the person's funds using the person's ATM card
- abrupt changes in a will or other financial documents
- unexplained disappearance of funds or valuable possessions
- substandard care being provided or bills unpaid, despite the availability of adequate financial resources
- being charged for unsolicited work or being significantly overcharged for work done
- discovery of a person's signature being forged for financial transactions or for the titles of his/her possessions
- sudden appearance of previously uninvolved relatives claiming their rights to a person's affairs and possessions
- unexplained sudden transfer of assets to a family member or someone outside the family;
- person's refusal to spend money
- a person's report of financial exploitation

## Neglect

- dehydration, malnutrition, untreated bed sores, and poor personal hygiene
- pallor, sunken eyes or cheeks
- unattended or untreated health problems
- hazardous or unsafe living condition/ arrangements (e.g., improper wiring, no heating, or no running water)
- unsanitary and unclean living conditions (e.g. dirt, fleas, lice on person, soiled bedding, fecal/urine smell, inadequate clothing)
- the absence of required aids, including reading glasses, dentures
- medicines not purchased or administered
- a person's report of being mistreated

## Other types of abuse include:

- Discriminatory abuse - including harassment, name calling and unfair treatment because of disability, race, gender or gender identity, age, sexual orientation or religion
- Cyber-bullying
- Hate crime
- Forced marriage
- Female genital mutilation
- Modern slavery

## Steps to take if you suspect abuse

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- RECOGNISE** the signs that could indicate that abuse is happening
- LISTEN** sensitively to the person and to what they have to say; don't ask closed questions or attempt to investigate
- RECORD** what you have been told, factually and accurately, using the language used by the person disclosing, within an hour
- REPORT** immediately to a Diocesan Safety Adviser who will know who to seek support from, unless the person is in immediate danger, in which case call the Police on 111
- REFER** to the appropriate statutory authority with the help of a Diocesan Safety Adviser

## Some victim support links

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*When abuse is disclosed you should encourage the victim to contact places where they can get support. You could offer to accompany them to the agency or be present during phone calls, as their support person.*

- If there is immediate danger ring the Police on 111 (or 105 for non-emergency complaints about criminal behaviour)
- Safe to Talk sexual harm healthline 0800 044 334
- Women's Refuge 0800 733 843
- Family Violence It's Not Okay 0800 456 450
- Family Action 0800 326 327 regarding domestic abuse
- Elder Abuse Not OK 0800 32 668 65 or Age Concern 0800 652 105
- Victim Information line 0800 650 654

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