

Elder abuse

IDENTIFYING, PREVENTING, AND RESPONDING



CRIME VICTIMS
ASSISTANCE CENTER

Support, Help and Resources

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FOREWORD

Elder abuse is becoming a more frequent topic of discussion in the media.

Is the issue becoming more common? Not necessarily. Rather, it is far more likely that we are discussing the issue of elder abuse, because as a society, we have taken a stand against such unacceptable behaviour.

As criminal offences are frequently committed within most abusive situations, the CAVAC, Crime Victims Assistance Center, decided to produce a reference guide specifically for people who are directly or indirectly affected by the abuse of senior citizens.

This brochure addresses seniors who are currently experiencing abusive situations and those who are looking for ways to prevent elder abuse. People who are concerned about an aging loved one, or individuals who are in a position to observe the mistreatment of a senior, will also find useful information within this guide.

WHAT IS ELDER ABUSE?

Definition : *Elder abuse can be defined as «a single, or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust, which causes harm or distress to an older person.»*

FORMS OF ABUSE

1) Psychological/Emotional

If you feel that someone is attempting to control you and make you feel afraid, insecure or guilty, you may be experiencing psychological or emotional abuse. The following behaviors are examples of this type of abuse: denigrating comments, unjustified criticisms (overly critical), infantilizing the individual, threats, and blackmail. A further sign of elder abuse can be the tone and aggressiveness of the way in which a senior is being spoken to.

Psychological abuse can also take the form of social isolation or withholding affection, for example by preventing you access to the outings or visitors that you would otherwise be able to enjoy. This is a way of denying you the right to make your own decisions, and can extend to your social, spiritual, or religious life as well. This kind of behaviour can undermine a person's identity, dignity, and self-esteem.

2) Physical

Physical abuse can include: arm-squeezing, pushing, shoving, rough handling, striking, or the use of a weapon. Actions like these don't always leave marks, but when done deliberately, they are never acceptable. Physical abuse can also involve abusive administration of medication or the use of inappropriate restraints.

3) Sexual

Sexual abuse is defined as a sexual act that occurs without the person's consent. This can include harassment, physical contact, touching, exhibitionism, sexual comments or actions, unwanted sexual relations. Ridiculing seniors who want to express their sexuality, or denying them their privacy are further examples. Remember that you always have the right to refuse unwanted sexual contact, regardless of your relationship with the person in question.

4) Financial/Material

If someone is using your finances or your belongings without your consent, either by force or for purposes which are contrary to your best interests, then you may be experiencing financial or material abuse. This type of abuse can be accompanied by blackmail and other types of threats.

Aside from theft, financial abuse may consist of bank and credit card fraud, fraudulent investments, misappropriation of funds, breach of trust, abuse of power of attorney, refusal to repay loans, overcharging you for services provided, pressuring you to sign documents against your will or depriving you of home support in order to save money.

5) Violations of Human Rights

This is when someone attempts to prevent you from exercising normal control over your life and your rights as a citizen, resulting in stripping you of your individual, material, or social rights. Some examples include: forcing you to undergo a medical treatment, not honouring the choices you make regarding where to live, whether or not to vote, how to vote, etc., or failing to respect your independence, privacy, or dignity.

6) Systemic or Institutional

As a client or resident of an institution, your rights and freedom must be protected. An institution's policies and procedures that result in or tolerate a situation that is harmful to your well-being, which may have consequences on your health or safety; as well as abuse of authority, lack of appropriate accommodations for the residents, poorly trained staff, or inadequate support for residents are examples of systemic or institutional abuse.

7) Ageism

Discrimination on the basis of age can take many forms. Ageism refers to social prejudices and behavioural patterns that may result in reducing seniors self esteem and negate their identity and dignity. It can be expressed through hostile attitudes and actions, or through indifference and social marginalisation.

8) Negligence

Negligence is a failure to meet a person's basic needs thereby compromising their health and safety. Negligence can be voluntary or involuntary (i.e., through ignorance or lack of awareness). If someone abandons you, or deprives you of food, care, assistance and companionship, you may be experiencing negligence.

Elder abuse can be defined as "a single, or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust which causes harm or distress to an older person."

WHAT IS A CRIMINAL OFFENCE?

While there is no acceptable form of elder abuse, not all situations of abuse constitute criminal offences. A criminal offence is an act or omission that violates the law which is in place to ensure public order, the safety of individuals, their property, and the general public.

THERE ARE TWO CATEGORIES OF CRIMINAL OFFENCES

► CRIMES AGAINST THE PERSON:

Assault: Assault means to use or attempt to use force against another person, whether physically, using a weapon, or threats.

Example: You are a victim of assault if someone attempts to harm you physically such as hitting, pushing, or throwing objects at you.

Robbery: Robbery means to take another person's property using violence or threats of violence.

Example: Someone shoves you on the sidewalk and steals your handbag.

Threat: Threats are words or actions that express a person's intention to harm someone. A threat could be to kill or inflict bodily harm (injury) on someone.

Example: Someone says, "I'm going to kill you".

Harassment: This crime consists of the constant or repetitive action towards an individual knowing that the individual feels harassed by the actions. If the context of the action or behavior results in the belief that they or someone they know fears for their safety, it constitutes criminal harassment.

Example: Someone calls or visits you several times a day, even though you have told them not to, and this behavior results in you being afraid of the individual.

Sexual Offences: This refers to completed or attempted physical contact for sexual purposes with a person who has not given their consent. There are many types of sexual offences, including sexual assault, incest, and exhibitionism.

Example: Someone touches you, watches you for sexual pleasure, or imposes sexual relations on you.

► CRIMES AGAINST PROPERTY

Breaking and Entering: This is the crime of entering a private domain without having been invited, with the intention of committing a crime.

Example: Someone breaks a window and enters your home in order to steal your television.

Theft: Theft means to take a person's property or money, without the use of violence, but without the person's consent.

Example: Someone steals money from your wallet without your knowledge.

Fraud: Fraud means to take money or property, without using violence, by obtaining the person's consent through dishonest means.

Example: A person convinces you to give your credit card number over the phone in order to purchase a product, and then fails to provide the item, but subsequently debits an amount from your credit card.

Mischief: This is the crime of destroying or damaging another person's property.

Example: Someone deliberately breaks an object that belongs to you.

REACTIONS AND CONSEQUENCES

Criminal offences and abuse carry diverse consequences and can reduce the quality of life of the senior citizen who experiences them.

HERE ARE SOME OF THE MOST COMMON IMPACTS:

- Injuries; temporary or permanent physical effects
- Persistent fear, increased feelings of vulnerability
- Anxiety, restlessness, confusion
- Withdrawal, self-isolation
- Loss of interest in one's usual activities
- Sleep disturbances
- Feelings of shame or guilt
- Loss of savings intended to ensure one's well-being
- Increase in emergency room visits
- Suicidal thoughts; suicide attempts
- Self-doubt
- Lowered self-esteem
- Difficulty making decisions
- Increased consumption of medication
- Family tensions
- Mistrust

If you are a victim of elder abuse, you may feel powerless to put an end to the situation, or may even believe that it is partly your fault. You may also be reluctant to report the situation out of fear of losing the assistance or support provided by the person who is mistreating you, because you are afraid of how the perpetrator will react.

However a criminal act or the psychological abuse affects you, it is important to know that the reactions and the consequences on your life and well being are normal. It is the situation itself that is abnormal.

WHAT CAN I DO IF I AM BEING ABUSED OR I AM A VICTIM OF A CRIME?

In most cases, senior citizens who are being mistreated know the perpetrator of the abuse. This person may be someone close to you, such as a spouse, a family member, a member of your care team, etc. It is entirely understandable if you find it difficult to talk about what you are experiencing, especially if the person who is mistreating you is someone very close to you.

MANY FACTORS CAN MAKE YOU RELUCTANT TO TALK ABOUT IT

- The person who is mistreating you is your only emotional, medical or social connection.
- You depend on this person.
- You have feelings for this person and are afraid of losing your connection to them.
- You are afraid of being alone, being placed in a facility, breaking apart the family, or being cast aside.
- You are afraid that you won't be believed or understood, or are afraid that no one can help you.
- You have been threatened or told not to talk about the situation and are afraid of the repercussions of doing so.
- You are afraid of the potential consequences for the abuser if you report the situation.
- And many more...

IF YOU ARE A VICTIM, OR THINK YOU MIGHT BE

- Do not try to handle the situation alone. Talk about it with someone you trust, such as a loved one, a family member, a priest, a health care professional, or a counselor. Reporting abuse does not necessarily mean filing a complaint, but simply making other people aware of what is going on as a way of finding support and alternatives to your situation.

- Do not hesitate to contact the support services at your disposal. Your local CIUSSS or a community organisation such as the CAVAC can listen to you, help you understand the dynamics of your situation, and help you identify your boundaries in order for you to be able to communicate them to the person who is mistreating you. A list of resources is included at the end of this guide, most of which are free and confidential.
- Consult a doctor if you have physical injuries or other health issues.
- Certain cases of abuse involve behaviour or actions that constitute criminal offences. If you believe that you are a victim of a crime, you can file a complaint with your local police service. Ask someone you trust or a counselor to support and assist you, if needed.
- If you fear for your safety, you can contact your local police service at any time. The police officers can make sure you are safe, intervene in a crisis situation, or refer you to other services that can help meet your needs.

No matter what anyone tries to make you believe, you are not responsible for the mistreatment you are experiencing, and you do not deserve to be abused.

WHAT CAN I DO IF I SUSPECT THAT SOMEONE I KNOW IS BEING MISTREATED, NEGLECTED OR IS A VICTIM OF A CRIME?

IN THE ABSENCE OF THE ABUSER

- Establish a relationship with the victim based on trust.
- Listen without judging.
- Offer your support.
- Respect the senior's needs, choices, and pace.
- Avoid judging or speaking poorly of the abuser - remember that this is often someone very close to the senior.
- Inform the senior of available resources and provide contact information and emergency numbers. If necessary, accompany the senior to these support services.
- Consider contacting these support services yourself to obtain information that will help you better understand the available services and enable you to provide the senior with tools and support they need.

SOME SIGNS OF ELDER ABUSE

- Bruises, injuries, physical pain
- Change of attitude, behaviour, habits
- Social isolation or withdrawal
- Anxiety
- Confusion
- Depression
- Poor personal hygiene
- Sleep disturbances
- Unpaid bills, increased banking transactions, financial concerns
- Disappearance of personal belongings
- Absence of basic needs and necessities such as food, eye glasses, dentures, and hearing aids
- Weight loss

WHAT IF I WITNESS A CRIME?

If you witness a crime or have reasonable grounds to believe that a crime has been committed, report it to your local police service in order to protect the victim and help prevent further crimes. Try to give the police as much information as possible about the situation or events you have witnessed.

All forms of abuse towards seniors are unacceptable.



While abuse or crime can happen to anyone at any time, taking certain precautions can help reduce the likelihood of it happening to you.

PREVENTION

ON THE STREET

- Walk in populated and brightly-lit areas.
- Adopt a self-assured manner and hold your head high so you can see around you.
- Only bring as much money as you need.
- Do not carry your handbag across your body; have the straps resting on your shoulder.
- If someone tries to steal your bag, do not try to resist: let the bag go to reduce your chances of getting injured. You may also consider carrying your wallet and/or keys in your jacket pocket instead of in a handbag.
- If you think someone is following you, go to the nearest home or business and ask for help.

IN YOUR VEHICLE

- Have your keys in hand so you do not have to linger beside your car.
- Remember to keep your vehicle locked at all times, when driving or when parked. If you want to speak with someone, only open the window enough to hear the other person.
- Use well lit streets and parking lots.
- If you feel you are in danger, press the horn repeatedly in short blasts to attract attention.

AT HOME

- Make sure your doors, windows, and locks are secure and keep your doors locked at all times.
- Install a wide-angle viewer in your front door so that you can see visitors before you open the door. Your door is your security; you have the right not to open it. It is okay to speak through the door or via intercom if you prefer.
- Do not hide a spare key outside your home. Instead, give copies to someone you trust, such as a friend or family member.


TRIPS AWAY FROM HOME

- Leave the radio on and one or two lights.
- Stop mail and newspaper deliveries during your absence or arrange to have someone pick them up.
- Arrange for someone to mow the lawn or shovel the snow.
- Be discreet about the fact that you will be away. Only tell people you trust.

ON THE PHONE

- Enter emergency numbers into your phone, or keep them close by the phone.
- Do not provide personal or financial information over the phone.
- Do not tell a caller that you live alone.
- Record a voicemail message that implies that several people live in the home. Eg.: "We are not available at the moment, but please leave a message and we will get back to you as soon as we can."
- Hang up if you receive bothersome, harassing, or threatening phone calls. Report these calls to your telephone company or the police, who will tell you how to proceed.

ONLINE

- Carefully consider what information to provide on the internet, including on social networking sites. Remember that this information is public.
- Before making an online purchase, make sure to use a secure and trustworthy website. Look for a padlock symbol  or the letters "https" at the start of the website address.
- Be wary of emails from financial institutions. Even if the message says it is urgent to reply by email, do not do so. Instead, go in person or call your financial institution using the phone number you have on file, not the contact numbers or addresses provided in the email.
- Beware of phoney phone calls or emails asking you for help by describing situations that require urgent assistance. Never send money – remember, you never really know who you are communicating with.

MONEY AND PROPERTY

- Practice discretion when talking about your plans, property, and valuables.
- Make a will and keep it up to date.
- Have your checks deposited directly into your bank account.
- Never sign a contract under pressure, or without having thoroughly read and understood the contents of the document.
- Do not invest your money or assets without giving it careful consideration. It is best to speak with a certified financial adviser, a lawyer, or someone else whom you trust.
- Avoid keeping large amounts of money in your home.

FRAUD

- Shred bills or personal documents before throwing them away.
- Cover the pin pad when entering your PIN (personal identification number). If necessary, ask the person behind you to back up so that you can enter your PIN in privacy.
- Regularly check the transactions made on your bank accounts and credit cards. Contact your financial institution if you discover any irregularities.
- Before entrusting your savings to a financial advisor, check with the Autorité des marchés financiers (AMF) whether the person or company you plan to deal with holds the necessary certification to provide this type of service.
- Do not reveal your PIN number to anyone. Memorise it and avoid writing it down. Choose a number that is easy for you to remember, but that would be difficult for someone else to guess. For example, do not choose your birthday, address or phone number.

If you are communicating with a salesperson, investor, or stranger whether on the phone, online, or in person, certain phrases and types of behaviour can raise a red flag.

Be cautious if the person :

- Quickly starts acting very familiar with you.
- Has you believe that there is an emergency and/or that only you can help, or asks you to keep it a secret.
- Says they will pay you if you cash a check for them.
- Insists or pressures you to buy an item or service, to sign an agreement or contract, or to transfer money to them.
- Promises you unusually high interest or an uncommon rate of return on an investment.
- Asks for money in order to award you a prize.
- Avoids answering your requests for clarification and asks you to trust them.

Stay alert if you find yourself in one of these situations. Asserting yourself and saying no is not impolite, it's simply cautious.

THE CRIME VICTIMS ASSISTANCE CENTER (CENTRE D'AIDE AUX VICTIMES D'ACTES CRIMINELS)

CAVAC is a community organisation that provides services to victims of crime, their immediate family and to witnesses of a crime. CAVAC provides assistance regardless of whether the perpetrator of the crime has been identified, apprehended, prosecuted, or convicted. You can seek assistance from the CAVAC even if you have not reported the crime to the police or do not intend to do so.

CAVAC treats victims with respect for their needs and proceeds at a pace which is comfortable for the victims. CAVAC believes that victims have the ability to manage their lives and are able to make decisions for themselves.

CAVAC's services are offered to all, with courtesy, fairness, understanding, and respect for the dignity and privacy.

CAVAC'S SERVICES ARE FREE AND CONFIDENTIAL.

1 866 532-2822

1 866 LE CAVAC

www.cavac.qc.ca



CRIME VICTIMS
ASSISTANCE CENTER

Support, Help and Resources

CAVAC PROVIDES THE FOLLOWING SERVICES

► **POST-TRAUMA AND «PSYCHOSOCIAL» INTERVENTION**

CAVAC offers post-trauma and psychosocial intervention, assesses the needs and resources of victims of crime, and can offer intervention to help alleviate the consequences of the victimisation and allow the victims to regain control of their lives.

► **INFORMATION ON RIGHTS AND RECOURSES**

CAVAC provides information on the rights of victims of crime, the recourses available to them, including the procedures undertaken during the judicial process. An explanation of the compensation programs for victims of crime is also provided.

► **TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE**

CAVAC assists crime victims in filling out required forms, and help enable them to comply with all the requirements asked of the victim associated with the crime.

► **ACCOMPANIMENT**

CAVAC provides support throughout the judicial process, as well as working in partnership with victims being assisted by other services and resources.

► **REFERRALS TO SPECIALISED SERVICES**

CAVAC refers victims to specialised services such as appropriate legal, medical, social and community resources capable of assisting them with their specific needs.

*If you need help, advice,
or someone to listen...*

EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE

► EMERGENCY SERVICES

Emergency 9-1-1

For areas not served by 9-1-1, dial 310-4141.
If using a cell phone, dial *4141

Complaints and police reports

Contact your local police station.

Info santé (telephone health information) 8-1-1

COMMUNITY, SOCIAL, AND LEGAL SERVICES

A.Q.D.R. (Quebec association for retired people's rights) www.aqdr.org (French only)	514-935-1551 1-877-935-1551
The Quebec bar www.barreau.qc.ca	1-800-361-8495
Crime victims assistance centre (CAVAC) www.cavac.qc.ca	1-866-532-2822
Autorité des marchés financiers (AMF) www.lautorite.qc.ca	1-877-525-0337
Suicide prevention centre	1-866-277-3553
Public Curator www.curateur.gouv.qc.ca	1-800-363-9020
Complaint assistance centres www.fcaap.ca	1-877-767-2227
Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca	1-800-771-5401
Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre www.antifraudcentre-centreantifraude.ca	1-888-489-2287
Crime victims compensation (IVAC) www.ivac.qc.ca	1-800-561-4822
Council for the protection of the sick www.cpm.qc.ca	1-877-276-2433

Elder abuse helpline	1-888-489-2287 Montreal area : 514-489-2287
Toll-Free Helpline for Victims of Sexual Assault www.agressionsexuelles.gouv.qc.ca	1-888-933-9007 Montreal area : 514-933-9007
Consumer protection bureau (OPC) www.opc.gouv.qc.ca	1-888-672-2556 Montreal area : 514-253-6556
Ombudsman www.protecteurducitoyen.qc.ca	1-800-463-5070
Housing/Rental Board www.rdl.gouv.qc.ca	1-800-683-2245 Montreal area : 514-873-2245
Organization grouping sexual assault help centres in Quebec (CALACS) www.rqcalacs.qc.ca	1-877-717-5252
Quebec's old age federation (Réseau F.A.D.O.Q.) www.fadoq.ca	1-800-828-3344
The Quebec Law Network www.avocat.qc.ca	1-877-683-1815
Quebec's provincial police www.suretequebec.gouv.qc.ca	514-598-4141 (frais d'appel acceptés)
Domestic violence helpline www.sosviolenceconjugale.ca	1-800-363-9010 Montreal area : 514-873-9010
Senior helpline www.tel-ecoute.org	450-493-4512 514-493-4512 1-877-353-2460



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