



PERCEPTIONS OF ABUSE

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

The Perceptions Of Abuse Project

Perceptions of Abuse, a case study of elder abuse, as seen through the eyes of adolescents, provides powerful stimulus for discussion. The video creates awareness of abuse and neglect of older people and encourages the idea of prevention through education.

The accompanying package of resource materials serves to guide and direct discussion following the viewing of the video. The group leader may choose from a variety of thought provoking questions depending upon the age and composition of the group and the desired outcome. Given the complexity of this issue background information on Elder Abuse has been provided . It is further suggested that the group leader focus on an anticipated learning outcome before initiating the group discussion.

Use of the video and resource material will:

- *Generate awareness and understanding of the issue of neglect and abuse of older people*
- *Encourage elders and future elders to protect themselves and their peers from all forms of abuse*
- *Help caregivers to recognize the potential to curb incidents of elder abuse before they begin*
- *Promote the belief that every age group has a part to play in the identification and resolution of abusive situations*

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Facts And Background Information

The number of older people living in Canadian society is on the rise and many of these older Canadians suffer from abuse or neglect.

Abuse is any action / inaction perpetrated by a person in a position of trust, which jeopardizes the health or well-being of an elderly person .

It may include:

PHYSICAL PSYCHOLOGICAL OR EMOTIONAL FINANCIAL SEXUAL
DENIAL OF CIVIL /HUMAN RIGHTS NEGLECT MEDICATION ABUSE

The most valuable solution to any social problem is prevention and the basis for prevention of elder abuse is to create more awareness.

Who Abuses?

- Abusers may be family members (spouse, son, daughter, relative) or anyone else who has power in the relationship with the older person.
- The abuser of an elderly person may be financially dependent on the victim.
- The abuser of an elderly person may be suffering from a personality disorder, drug or alcohol abuse or an emotional problem.
- Abuse of elderly persons from professionals usually arises in the form of neglect, poor care or overall disrespect of the older person. In residential care the abuse of the elderly may include financial abuse or theft.



Who Is Likely To Be An Abuser ? Each of us is a potential abuser. Whether or not we will become an abuser depends on many things. Most people will not, but people who abuse older adults are more likely to have negative attitudes towards aging or paternalistic attitudes toward older people. They are more likely to view the old person as a child, rather than as an adult who has the right to make decisions for himself or herself. If we see someone as childlike or somehow “inferior”, it becomes a lot easier to rationalize why we are treating the older

person the way we are.

Another very common characteristic of abusers is that they often use “power and control” techniques to get the abused person to do what they want. Power and control techniques include things like threatening or intimidating. Power and control also includes using “privilege” (“you can’t do that because you’re old/ a woman,,an Indian” or “Only I can do this because I am a man/working/young”). These techniques also include things like isolating the abused person so that she or he doesn’t get a chance to learn if what the abuser is saying or doing is wrong. Some people think that abusers are reacting to stresses such as being unemployed, having a drinking problem , or caring for someone whose health is very poor. While these

Adolescents and Young Adults

As a result of viewing the video *Perceptions of Abuse*, and participating in classroom activities and discussions, the students will:

1. Become aware of and begin to understand the issue of neglect and abuse of older people in our society.
2. Begin to recognize some of the personality characteristics, family dynamics and lifestyle situations which contribute to, and may cause, an abusive situation.
3. Understand that neglect and abuse of older people is a serious problem and, regardless of age, each one of us can play a part in its prevention.
4. Become aware of local resources, which can provide answers to questions, should they identify and need information about an abusive situation in their own lives.

To encourage the students to think about the topic of elder abuse they could complete the following sentences:

1. Older people are: _____

2. The abuse and neglect of older people is: _____

3. Victims of elder abuse are: _____

4. Those who neglect or abuse elders are: _____

The Middle Years

This generation is the sandwiched population, caught between older parents and younger children. Perceptions of Abuse, is a powerful catalyst for discussion among this group. The use of the video will enable participants to:

- *allow the acknowledgement of the existence of elder abuse*
- *promote a problem solving discussion*
- *acknowledge and support the stresses of the middle years, including various care giving responsibilities*
- *encourage the middle years to evaluate repeating patterns of family behaviour, both as a child of an older parent and as a parent of a child*
- *encourage the middle years to consider their own aging process.*

Special Considerations

Acceptance

When bringing a group together for viewing be prepared for some denial of the problem. Initially there may be resistance to acknowledging the problem. Elder abuse is a painful reality and the topic must be treated with great sensitivity.

Group Size

A group of twelve to fourteen adults is ideal, while at least four participants would be required to provide a stimulating discussion. Keep in mind that most adults have already put in a full day. Try to limit the meeting to two hours with a break for light refreshments.

The Caregiver Factor

Some of the participants may actually be care giving for an older adult. You may want to ask who has or is currently caring for an older person. Provide an opportunity for them to share their knowledge and experience.

- Elder abuse is a highly complex social issue with implications for the individual, family and society.
- Encourage participants to explore issues such as self-esteem, isolation and financial independence.
- There are no right or wrong responses to the following suggested discussion questions which are intended as a guide only.

2. How can people protect themselves from becoming victims?
3. What steps can we take to ensure we do not become abusers or raise abusers?
4. Does government have a role to play in elder abuse issues?
5. Should anyone else be involved?

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Seniors

Perceptions of Abuse may be used to stimulate the following learning outcomes:

- *Allow acknowledgement of the existence of the problem*
- *Allow for discussion regarding possible solutions to the problem*
- *Provide support for those who have felt “alone” as abused elders*
- *Allow seniors to view the problem of elder abuse against the backdrop of repeating patterns of family behaviour*
- *Empower seniors to take appropriate action in abusive situations.*

Special Considerations

Acceptance

When bringing the group together for viewing there may initially be denial of the problem. Resistance to acknowledging elder abuse may be present. It is a painful reality and the topic must be treated with the utmost sensitivity.

Group Size

In general, seniors do not participate well in large groups due to decreased sensory acuity. Group size is an important consideration. It is suggested a group of ten participants would be a maximum group size while at least four participants would be required to provide stimulating discussion.

Consideration of Special Needs

It is important to determine the special needs of your group. In order to maximize participation for seniors several important factors need consideration.

Visual impairment is also common in the elderly. Group members must be seated in a manner which allows a good view of the television monitor. It is best to close curtains to reduce glare and to provide only soft background lighting during the viewing of the video.

Hearing loss is common in the elderly and often accounts for their lack of participation in group discussion. When deficits in this area are present all group members should be reminded to speak loudly and clearly. Those with hearing impairments should be encouraged to ask for repetition as required and should be assured that this will not cause problems for others present. Where there are several group members with hearing impairment it would be helpful to place group members near to one another. Try to limit the group to six to eight participants. An amplification system with a cordless microphone may assist participants to hear the questions and responses of other group members. The group leader must also be prepared to provide repetition of questions and responses.

Decreased lung capacity is another physical factor that will impact upon the effectiveness of group discussion. Limited lung capacity affects the volume and projection of speech. It may compound the difficulties other group members may be experiencing with hearing. Repetition of group member responses will facilitate effective group discussion when this problem is evident.

Ability to concentrate for prolonged periods of time may be limited. Maximum benefit will be achieved through limiting group sessions to a maximum of one hour. Ensure that the viewing and discussion will take place in an area which is free of competing stimuli. Your group's ability to comprehend information and respond appropriately will determine the need for slightly shorter or longer sessions.

Short term memory loss is another factor to consider. Seniors with severe short term memory loss are not suitable for participation in this type of group discussion. Group members with mild short term memory loss will benefit from repetition in the presentation of learning materials and by slowing the rate of the presentation. Beginning each group session with a recap of the discussion to date will help to solidify information in the minds of the participants. An opportunity to view the video more than once is essential to ensure that the information presented is sufficiently retained.

- Elder abuse is a highly complex social issue with implications for the individual, family and society.
 - Encourage participants to explore issues such as self-esteem, isolation and financial independence.
 - There are no right or wrong responses to the following suggested discussion questions.
1. The teens are asked to talk about what they have learned. One member says she knew nothing about elder abuse before the discussion. Were you aware of the problem before it was brought to your attention today? Why do you think that the problem of elder abuse remains hidden?
 2. Did the content of the video provide you with any new insights? If so, what are they?
 3. How did you feel after hearing Norman's story?
 4. While watching the video, did you consider what you would do if you were in Norman's situation? If so, what are your thoughts regarding Norman's options?
 5. What were your thoughts about the student's insights and perceptions?

Elder Abuse and The Law

- * *Adult protection legislation implies that older people are incompetent and unable to make the report on their own resulting in disempowerment and infantilism*
- * *Identification of the problem of elder abuse is often difficult because of the usual reluctance of the victim to report the incidents of the abuse.*
- * *Healthcare provider suspicions of abuse are often not acted upon because of the anticipated lack of corroboration among the people concerned.*
- * *Individuals who are being abused often fear reprisal or facility placement as possible retaliation to their report of the abuse.*

But Not In Canada, Eh?

Question:

If Norman lived in Canada, would his situation be any different as far as laying or dropping charges?

Answer:

Probably not, and that is why people who have been abused need considerable support and assistance in handling these difficult situations. Throughout most of Canada, domestic violence is handled this way: if police have evidence that a spouse or a person living common law has been assaulted, the police can press charges, regardless of what the victim wants. When the decision to lay charges rests solely with the police, it can take pressure off the person who has been abused. But this police charging policy does not extend to assaults by adult sons, daughters or other relatives. Also, in practice, the police very seldom lay charges if the husband or wife is a senior.

If the abused person does not want to, or is afraid to, co-operate with the police, it is less likely that the police will lay charges, except where the physical damage resulting from the attack is severe. Even if charges are laid, without the abused person's willingness to testify, the prosecutor's job is very difficult. For example, Norman might say that he will deny the incident in court. In this case, it is unlikely the prosecutor will force Norman to perjure himself. The prosecutor knows that without Norman's true testimony, chances of the son's conviction are slight. Even where the son is found guilty, if Norman asks for leniency on his son's behalf, the judge may decide to discharge the criminal conviction. In short, without the victim's cooperation, the chance of a criminal conviction in these types of cases is not great.