



# **Safeguarding adults: Specific types of abuse and their indicators**

The MS Society is committed to making sure that adults at risk in contact with the organisation are protected from abuse.

The different types and indicators of abuse and harm are listed below. The presence of one or more indicators does not establish that abuse or harm has occurred - these are merely indicators.

## **Physical abuse or harm**

This may include shaking, pinching, slapping, force feeding, biting, burning or scalding. It may also involve causing needless physical discomfort, the withholding of care, or the use of inappropriate care, such as inappropriate restraint, inappropriate moving and rough handling, improper administration or denial of medication.

### **Indicators of physical abuse or harm**

- A history of unexplained falls, cuts or minor injuries
- Bruising on soft parts of the body; crusted as if from repeated striking, in well protected areas not normally prone to injury such as thighs, or inside upper arm
- Finger marks
- Burns of an unusual kind or in an unusual place
- Injuries shaped like an object
- Injuries to head or face
- A reluctance to seek medical or other help
- Frequent attendance at hospital accident and emergency department

## **Verbal abuse or harm**

Verbal abuse includes name calling, shouting, sarcasm, inappropriate use of humour and insulting, threatening, shaming, demeaning or derogatory language.

### **Indicators of verbal abuse or harm**

- Use of derogatory nicknames
- Jokes that make the person uncomfortable

## **Sexual abuse or harm**

This includes any form of sexual activity that the adult does not want, to which they have not consented, could not consent or were pressurised into consenting to. This includes being encouraged or enticed to touch the abuser, or being forced to watch pornography. Any sexual relationship between adults where one is in a position of authority (e.g. health worker, residential worker) will be regarded as abuse - although where consent is given this may not be regarded as a criminal offence under the law.

### **Indicators of sexual abuse or harm**

- Withdrawal, choosing to be alone
- Explicit or untypical sexual language or behaviour
- Self inflicted injuries
- Self neglect

## **Psychological/emotional abuse or harm**

This includes the use of intimidation, rejection, threats, shouting, indifference and the withdrawal of approval. It also includes oppressive language, denial of choice, deprivation of dignity or privacy, the denial of the right to follow one's own religious or spiritual beliefs or sexual orientation.

### **Indicators of psychological/emotional abuse or harm**

- Change in appetite/unusual weight loss or gain
- Inability to sleep
- Low self esteem
- Confusion, fearfulness, agitation
- Unexplained uneasiness, particularly in the presence of particular people
- Becoming withdrawn

### **Neglect or acts of omission**

This is the withholding, whether deliberately or unintentionally, of the help or support necessary for the individual to carry out daily living tasks. This includes ignoring medical or physical care needs or a failure to provide health, educational or social support. It also includes the withholding of medication, nutrition, heating and keeping the person in isolation. Neglect can also include the failure to intervene in potentially dangerous situation, especially when the person lacks the mental capacity to assess risks.

### **Indicators of neglect or acts of omission**

- Inadequate physical care
- Frequent use of emergency or out of hours services in preference to mainstream services

### **Financial or material abuse or harm**

This covers the inappropriate use, exploitation or misappropriation of property, possessions or financial resources. It includes theft, deception, false accounting, fraud, exploitation or pressure in connection with wills, property, inheritance or financial transactions.

### **Indicators of financial or material abuse or harm**

- Unexplained or sudden inability to pay bills
- Unexplained or sudden withdrawal from accounts
- Large withdrawals from accounts
- Inconsistency between standard of living and income

## **Self harm and self neglect**

Self harm and self neglect describes a wide range of things people do to themselves in a deliberate and usually hidden way which are damaging. This can include refusal to eat or drink, drug or alcohol misuse, cutting, burning, scalding and failure to care for oneself.

### **Indicators of self harm and self neglect**

- Unexplained weight loss/gain
- Unexplained injuries
- Poor personal hygiene

### **A note on suicide**

Other than in Scotland where the issue of self-harm is a recognisable form of abuse, suicidal ideation in itself is not a safeguarding matter. However, you should consider the circumstances fully:

- Are others, for example children, involved or at risk of harm?
- Has assisted suicide been mentioned?
- Is the adult with care and support needs being influenced or pressured by someone else to end their own life?
- Are there other forms of abuse contributing to their feeling of wanting to end their life?

## **Discriminatory abuse or harm**

This is abuse motivated by discriminatory or oppressive attitudes around race, gender, cultural background, religion, age, disability or sexual orientation. This may take the form of denial of religious practices, lack of appropriate food, denial of the opportunity to develop relationships or of health care.

### Indicators of discriminatory abuse or harm

- Being treated unequally compared to other service users in terms of the provision of care, treatment or services
- Being isolated
- Dismissive or derogatory language and attitudes from carers or staff

### Institutional or organisational abuse or harm

Abuse or harm within an institution or organisation can be personal or institutional/organisational. Any personal abuse would fall into the categories above. Institutional or organisational abuse or harm occurs when procedures and routines mean adults at risk have to sacrifice their rights to meet the needs of the institution or organisation.

### Indicators of institutional or organisational abuse or harm

- Inflexible daily routines, e.g. set bedtimes/deliberate waking up
- Dirty clothing and bed linen
- Lack of personal clothing and possessions
- Inappropriate use of power, control, restriction or confinement
- Misuse of finances
- Failure to record incidents or concerns
- Lack of training, risk assessment, supervision or management

**Find out more**

See our full **Safeguarding adults policy and procedure** for more information. You can find this either:

- on our volunteer website  
<http://volunteers.mssociety.org.uk/safeguarding>
- by requesting a printed copy from the **Supporter Care Team**

<b>Safeguarding adults: Specific types of abuse and their indicators v2</b>	
Content owner:	Quality and Safeguarding Manager
Editor:	Quality and Innovation Projects Officer
Signed off:	August 2016
Review date:	August 2019
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