

Talking About Abuse

My friend has Parkinson's and I'm, concerned she is being abused. I'm worried that she is not safe. Where can I find help?

Abuse is a difficult topic to discuss, and it's commendable that you are looking for a way to help when abuse so often stays a secret. Abuse can take different forms, whether it includes neglect or is physical, psychological, financial, sexual, or medical. People of all walks of life can be vulnerable to mistreatment from others. Men and women, people of all ages and abilities, can be on the giving or receiving end of abuse.

Due to both the motor and non-motor symptoms of Parkinson's, some people living with Parkinson's disease (PlwPD) might be even more vulnerable. While each person is different in terms of the progression of Parkinson's and the impact of those symptoms, many PlwPD say that they notice themselves becoming more dependent upon others, and that they often begin to feel very isolated.

That said, carepartners can also be at risk for some of these same reasons. Often, both the PlwPD and carepartners' support networks become very small, and these relationships can become stressed. Carepartners can be vulnerable also to abuse from the PlwPD or others.

Unfortunately, abuse is much more common than we think. If you think that a person is being abused or neglected (or is seriously neglecting him or herself), and cannot get help on his/her own, the following information, consider the following:

In an emergency...

If the situation is an emergency and the person's safety or life is at risk, **call 911 or the police emergency number** for your community.

If it is not an emergency but there is still reason for concern...

If there is more time to take action, you can do some of the following:

- If you feel comfortable, talk to the person. Ask if they need assistance and if there is someone you can contact on their behalf
- Call the Office of the Public Guardian and Trustee at 1-800-366-0335. Ask about their role in helping vulnerable adults (i.e. a senior or person with a disability) get support regarding possible abuse or neglect

- Phone the Seniors Safety Line for referral information for local agencies across the province that can assist in cases of elder abuse. Trained counsellors also provide safety planning and supportive counseling for older adults who are being abused or at-risk of abuse. Family members and service providers can also call for information about community services: 1-866-299-1011
- Phone the Victim Support Line, a province-wide, multilingual, toll-free information line providing a range of services to victims of crime: 1-888-579-2888
- Look for local Elder Abuse Networks and resources through Elder Abuse Ontario www.elderabuseontario.com

This can be challenging territory to navigate. The person who brings issues of abuse into the light can often become a target themselves, in the sense that others can become angry with you. If you become involved, be prepared and create a self-care plan for yourself.

Options for intervening

Legal options are limited if a person is a mentally capable adult and understands the decision that she is making.

However, as a concerned friend or family member, you may truly be able to make a difference simply by showing that you care. In fact, sometimes these situations prompt PlwPD and carepartners/friends to create a formal network of support, made up of family and/or friends. They can meet once a month or as needed to help in whatever way is needed (make meals, socialize, coordinate and plan care.)

Call our office for more information on this. It's best to set these up before a crisis hits – abuse sometimes takes place when people's coping resources are completely depleted and they don't know what else to do.

There are many other factors to consider. Please call the PSCNO office for more information or support around this topic.

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