

# Hints and Tips

## Keeping people safe

### Why we have written these hints and tips

Most older people are managing to live their lives comfortably and securely. They feel safe where they are living.

Some people worry about the things they hear about in the press about older people in other places. There is a small proportion of older people who do experience harm. In Scotland we have good arrangements that are there to keep older people safe, but people may not remember this or know where to get advice and help.

We have been talking to people in community groups, older people's forums and other groups about the things that worry them and what they do to try and keep themselves and other older people safe. They have been telling us about some of the steps that they have taken.

These tips are to help groups led by older people and other community groups be confident that the people they know are safe, and that they know what to do if they are worried about someone.

**"The newspapers only write about bad news. That's not my experience. I get help at home. The carers are really nice and helpful. My friends pop in to see me. They all look out for me."**

### What people told us

"I had someone come to the door and they persuaded me to take out a savings policy. It sounded a really good deal. I showed it to my son – he didn't like the sound of it. He got in touch with the police. He sorted it out for me. I won't do that again."

"I get lots of phone calls trying to sell me things or get me to sign up for special offers. They always seem in a rush to get me to sign up to them. I find it harder to make decisions about things like this now."

"I use email, have done for years. I've been getting emails from the bank telling me that they need to change my password as someone has tried to get into my bank account. I know I shouldn't give it to them. But other people might get taken in."

"I live with my family. My son looks after my pension for me. He uses it to help pay for me living with them. There doesn't seem to be much left for me. I don't want to ask him about it."

"My friend used to be really happy to see me whenever I visited her. Nowadays she doesn't seem interested in anything I say. Her husband doesn't let me stay very long. I'm worried about her."

"I have a team of care workers who take it in turns to help me. I like some of them. One of them is a bit rough. She seems to take ages getting my clothes from the bedroom. What is she doing in there? Who can I talk to about it?"

## Protecting adults at risk of harm and helping to keep people safe

Most older people manage to live their lives comfortably and securely. People live independently or with help from caring relatives, friends, neighbours, workers or volunteers.

A small number of people may experience harm, such as:

- Physical abuse.
- Being bullied or threatened.
- Being forced or pressured into sexual activity.
- Having their money or possessions taken.
- Not receiving the care that they need.

Some older people might be less able to protect themselves because they:

- Are frail.
- Have a physical disability.
- Have a learning disability.
- Have a form of dementia.
- Have other mental health issues.
- Have sight problems or are blind.
- Have hearing problems or are deaf.

## Who can harm vulnerable adults?

Harm can happen anywhere including a person's own home, a care home, a hospital, in a public place.

Anyone can cause harm to vulnerable adults. It is often someone who the adult knows and trusts. It could be a partner, relative, friend, neighbour, care staff, health worker, volunteer, solicitor or financial advisor, or a stranger.

A person who causes harm may also be an adult at risk.

## How would you know if someone was being harmed?

The person may tell you that they are being harmed.

More often it is something you see or hear that is a sign that someone is being harmed or neglected.

They might:

- Behave in an unusual way.
- Have injuries.
- Suddenly become confused.
- Be scared of another person or be scared of going home.
- Be overly worried or upset.
- Not have much money or food.
- Be depressed, withdrawn or suspicious.

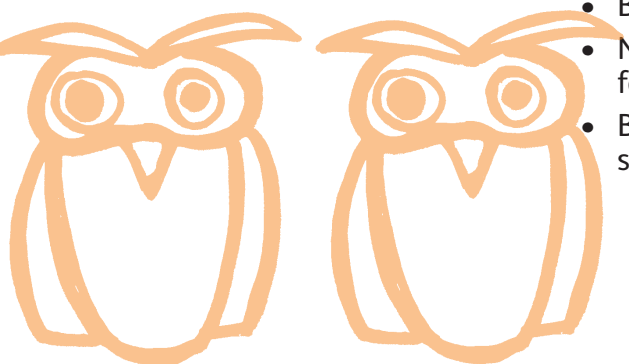
## What should you do if you think an adult is being harmed?

If you are being harmed in some way or are frightened or upset by someone's behaviour you do not have to put up with it. You have a right to feel safe. You can get help by phoning social work at your local council or speak to someone you trust such as a doctor, police officer, care worker or nurse.

If you see behaviour that you are worried about, or if an adult or older person tells you something that makes you worry:

- Speak to someone as soon as possible and tell them about your concerns.
- Go to someone such as a police officer, social worker or health professional.
- Give as much information as you can about the person and their circumstances to help make sure people get the help they need.
- Describe what you saw or heard that worried you.

**"I'm a volunteer with our local church group. If I am worried about anyone I tell Sandra the volunteer co-ordinator. She phones social work."**



'It is a lot to take in. We got the speakers to come back again. We asked lots of questions.'

'I feel a lot better now just because we've been talking about things that worry me.'  
'It was good to hear that these things don't happen very often. The newspapers make it sound as if they happen all the time.'

"The lady from the Council and the Community Police Officer were both very helpful and reassuring."

"We came up with some of our own tips – things to watch out for and who to talk to if you are worried about anything. We shared them with everyone in the group. We share them with other people we know."

"I have new care workers who come each day to help me. They are great. The last ones weren't so good. My son helped me talk to social work and I got new care workers. My son is sometimes here when the care workers come. The care workers know that my son pops in to see me when he is passing."

## What you can do in your group

### Provide information

**"We had a discussion about what things worry us. We realised that quite a few of us were worried about the same sort of things."**

Get in touch with the adult protection service in your local Council. In some areas there are advice organisations that can also come out to local groups.

- Tell them about your group and what things people worry about.
- Ask if they are the right people to talk about these sort of concerns. They will put you in touch with the right person if there is someone else who can give you advice.

"We got several different speakers to come and talk to our group. They told us:

- What to do to protect ourselves from scam letters, phone calls and emails.
- The do's and don'ts - including don't give anyone your bank or personal details.
- Who to talk to if we were worried about anything.
- What to do if we were worried about friends or other people we knew."

These are tips for getting the best from a speaker coming to the group:

- Ask about what people can do to keep themselves safe as well as what to do if any problem or worry does arise.
- Ask them to bring written information for people to take away and read afterwards.
- Put together a list of contact details of people and organisations who provide advice and help. Give everyone in your group a copy.
- Have copies of information and contact details with large type for people who have sight problems.
- Have follow up discussion sessions.

### Having someone to talk to

People are more at risk of harm when they have few other people in their lives. If someone has lots of people around them, it is less likely that anyone who is tempted to steal from or hurt someone will do it. And if someone is frightened or hurt, having people around who know them and care about them means it is more likely to get noticed and stopped.

One of the reasons older people become vulnerable to harm is that they are alone and have fewer people in their lives.

These are ways groups that bring older people together can help reduce people's social isolation.

- Include activities that make people feel and be included – having a place to meet other people regularly and have opportunities to be with people who are trusted.
- Try to help people in your group to think about who they can talk to if they are worried about anything.
- For people who don't have many friends or family nearby, think about how you can help to look out for each other.

**"Whenever I'm worried about something I talk to Joan who I know through the church coffee morning. She is sensible and helps me work out what to do."**

**"I have a couple of friends who I've known for years. We meet up once a week. I can talk to them about anything that I'm worried about."**

**"Since my husband died I feel quite vulnerable. I have some really good friends. They look out for me."**

**"My daughter is great. She phones me each day and visits often. I can talk to her about anything."**

**"When I wasn't able to go to out my friends popped in to see me each week. They helped me when I told them that I was getting pestered by lots of phone calls."**

**"My care workers are good and there is one person in particular who is full of common sense. I told him when I was worried about houses in our street being burgled. He arranged for the Community Police to come round and advise on new locks that I can still manage myself."**

## Training and information for volunteers and workers

It is a good idea to get training on keeping people safe for all workers and volunteers who are in touch with older people who might be more vulnerable to harm.

Many councils will require you to do this if your group or service gets money from them, because it is good practice.

You should also have a written policy, so each worker or volunteer knows what to do and who they should tell if they are concerned about someone being harmed or frightened.

**"We organise training for our volunteers. They visit and help older people. They get to know them. Some people tell them things or they spot something that isn't right. We have written guidance for them to follow if they are worried about anyone. They know who to report their concerns to."**

**"Our church group organised training for all our volunteers. We now know what to do if we think someone might be at risk of harm. We know who to contact in the council if we are worried about anyone. It is the council's role to look into our concerns."**

**"I didn't want to get anyone into trouble. I thought I might make things worse. But now I know what to do."**

**"The social worker went to visit Betty. They found that Betty's husband was really struggling to look after her. They arranged to get more services in to help. It has made all the difference to Betty and her husband. They are still living at home together. I'm so glad I said something."**

## The Adult Support and Protection (Scotland) Act 2007

This law was introduced to try to protect people from being harmed.

This is because some people may find it more difficult to stop harm happening to them. The Act calls people in this situation 'adults at risk'.

Harm (or abuse) can take many forms including physical, emotional, financial or sexual harm. It could also include neglect and acts of omission.

The Act describes adults at risk of harm as people aged 16 years or over who:

- Are unable to safeguard themselves, their property (their home, the things they own), their rights or other interests.
- Because they are affected by disability, mental disorder, illness or physical or mental infirmity, are more vulnerable to being harmed than others who are not so affected.

Having a particular condition such as a learning disability or a mental health problem does not automatically mean an adult is at risk. Someone can have a disability and be perfectly able to look after themselves.

The Act places certain responsibilities on local councils and others including health and police.

The council and other local agencies work together to identify, support and protect adults who may be at risk of harm or neglect and who may not be able to protect themselves.

Local Adult Protection Committees have been set up in all council areas in Scotland. They are made up of local agencies including social work, health and Police.

## More information

There is an Adult Protection service in each local authority.

There are independent advocacy services in each area that can give people advice and help them say what they need.

You can get contact details for services in each area at [www.overthefence.org.uk/localhelp](http://www.overthefence.org.uk/localhelp)

## Useful websites

**Action Against Harm** - this is the Scottish Government's website for anyone who is looking for help for themselves or is worried about someone. [www.actagainstharm.org](http://www.actagainstharm.org)

**Police Scotland** - this link has information about home safety and dealing with bogus callers. [www.scotland.police.uk/keep-safe](http://www.scotland.police.uk/keep-safe)

**Think Jessica** - information to protect people from scams by email and letter. [www.thinkjessica.com](http://www.thinkjessica.com)

**Alzheimer Scotland** - information about dementia and keeping people safe. [www.alzscot.org](http://www.alzscot.org)

**Age Scotland** for information about home safety and security including scams and bogus callers. [www.ageuk.org.uk/scotland/home--care/home-safety-and-security](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/scotland/home--care/home-safety-and-security)

**Citizens Advice Bureau** for information and tips about avoiding scams. The information is relevant to people in Scotland. [www.adviceguide.org.uk/england/consumer\\_e/consumer\\_protection\\_for\\_the\\_consumer\\_e/consumer\\_scams\\_e.htm](http://www.adviceguide.org.uk/england/consumer_e/consumer_protection_for_the_consumer_e/consumer_scams_e.htm)

**Over the Fence** - this is a website to help people find the support that is right for them, or for someone they care about. This is funded by the Scottish Government to help people get the support that is right for them. There are sections on what to do if you are worried about someone, and on how to find good quality care and support. It also has the contacts for help in each local area in Scotland. [www.overthefence.org.uk](http://www.overthefence.org.uk)



# About Wisdom in Practice

Wisdom in Practice is a project which supports and promotes the development of services and other activities led by older people. It is funded by the Scottish Government through the Equalities Programme and is run by Outside the Box.

There is a range of resources for groups, including publications, how to guides, events and development support for individual groups and projects.

This is one of a series of Hints and Tips for services and other activities led by older people. Other hints and tips include Dementia Friendly groups, Hearing Loss Friendly groups, Getting Started, Getting Organised and Finding the Funds.

Wisdom in Practice has its own website  
[www.wisdominpractice.org.uk](http://www.wisdominpractice.org.uk)



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