



Prevent **and Respond to** Adult Abuse



Adult Safeguarding Day

Safeguarding is putting measures in place to uphold our rights, to support our health and wellbeing, to reduce our risk of harm – and to empower us to protect ourselves.

Safeguarding involves ourselves, our families, services and professionals all working together to prevent and respond to adult abuse, neglect or coercive control.

Safeguarding means empowerment – that if we face challenges with our capacity, ability or independence our decisions are supported and respected.

PREVENT Adult Abuse

Adult Abuse happens when a person's rights, independence or dignity are not respected. This can be deliberate, or it can be caused by a lack of knowledge, or omission of care. However, all circumstances of not respecting a person's rights are abusive.

More than 10,000 cases of alleged abuse are reported to the HSE Safeguarding and Protection Teams each year, although the actual figure (including what is not reported, or reported to other authorities) is much higher.

Abuse can affect any adult at any stage of life but is more likely to occur at times of difficulty such as living with frailty due to age, a physical or intellectual disability, an acquired brain injury, a mental health condition, or in situations of coercive control.

Types of Abuse



Emotional and Psychological

Intimidation, threats, humiliation, isolation, verbal abuse or being prevented from receiving services.

Physical

Hitting, kicking, pushing, shaking, rough handling, threat of physical force, medication mismanagement.

Financial

Unauthorised or improper use of a person's funds, property, pension, or pressuring a person to transfer their assets.

Sexual

Sexual activity to which the person has not consented, could not consent, or felt compelled to consent to.

Organisational

Inadequate care, poor communication, or systematic poor practice by an organisation.

Online

Internet, email, or social media based scamming, bullying, or coercion.

Neglect

When essentials such as food, heating, medication, or hygiene are withheld – or a person's money is not used for their own benefit. It includes ignoring medical or physical care needs, failing to provide access to appropriate health and social care, or educational services.



Coercive Control

Making a person dependent by isolating them from support, exploiting them, depriving them of independence and regulating their everyday behaviours. It often involves multiple forms of abuse.

Discrimination

Unequal treatment, harassment or abuse of a person based on the grounds of gender, marital status, family status, age, disability, sexual orientation, race, religion and membership of the traveller community.

Common signs of Abuse, Neglect or Coercive Control are:

Physical

- Unexplained bruises, marks, or injuries
- Unusual weight loss
- Dirty, or unsafe living conditions
- Anxiety.

Neglect

- Poor hygiene
- Development of bedsores
- Hunger.

Financial

- Inexplicable shortage of money
- Suspicious addition of names to financial accounts
- Unexpected changes to will, or Power of Attorney.



Supported decision-making helps to prevent abuse



Preventing adult abuse involves many elements, and one important step which new laws are going to strengthen is supporting people to make their own decisions.

Safeguarding risks arise if an adult is prevented from making their own decisions. This risk is most likely to occur to a more vulnerable adult such as a person with age-related frailty, a physical or intellectual disability, or serious illness.

Some people with these conditions may live with reduced 'decision-making capacity' and it may be challenging for them make decisions about their daily life, care, or finances.

In these circumstances, sometimes family members incorrectly assume that they can make decisions on the person's behalf. However, nobody can make decisions on behalf of another adult unless they have been legally authorised to do so.

Every person is presumed to have the right to make their own decisions unless deemed not to have capacity, which requires certification by a healthcare professional.

New laws to support decision-making

Important reforms are coming under a new law called The Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act. This law will require health, legal and financial service providers, utilities and other services to presume a person has decision-making capacity. If there is any doubt, they must ensure that the person is supported to make their own decisions.

The new law makes different supports available for a person who may need help with their decision making.

A person can appoint someone they trust to either be their decision-making assistant, or co-decision maker. If a person cannot make their own decisions even with either of these supports, the court can appoint a decision-making representative.

A person can also plan in advance and make an Enduring Power of Attorney and an Advance Healthcare Directive to come into effect at a time when they lack capacity.

Decision Support Service

A new service, called the Decision Support Service (DSS), has been set up. The main role of the DSS is to provide information and guidance and to register and supervise decision support arrangements. More information is at www.decisionsupportservice.ie

RESPOND to Adult Abuse

If you are suffering abuse, neglect or coercive control, or this is happening to someone you know, the best thing to do is report it.

Depending on each circumstance different responses are recommended:

- If there is an immediate risk or danger call the Gardaí at 999 or 112
- If there is mistreatment which is serious, but it is not an immediate danger, report it urgently to the local Garda station (directory of stations at www.garda.ie), or call the Garda confidential line at 1800 666 111
- For an ongoing safeguarding concern that needs support, contact the local HSE Safeguarding and Protection Team. There are nine safeguarding and protection teams covering all regions in the country, and the contact details for each team are at www.hse.ie/safeguarding.
- There are also many support services and telephone helplines for abuse, neglect and coercive control which can be found online.



Safeguarding is all of us working together

We each need to safeguard ourselves – together with a shared understanding among families, communities, services and professionals. Public awareness needs to be backed up with appropriate laws, policies and accountability.

This leaflet has been produced to promote Adult Safeguarding Day, an initiative of Safeguarding Ireland that is supported by the HSE, and working together with organisations across the health, social, financial and justice sectors in Ireland.



Adult Safeguarding Day

safeguardingday.ie    

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An initiative of Safeguarding Ireland and supported by the HSE.

More Information

Safeguarding Ireland – www.safeguardingireland.org

HSE Safeguarding and Protection Teams – www.hse.ie/safeguarding

Directory of local Garda stations – www.garda.ie

Garda confidential line tel: 1800 666 111

Decision Support Service – www.decisionsupportservice.ie

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