

What are the risk factors?

Age does not protect someone from abuse. Sadly, as people get older they can also become more vulnerable. If you know an older person be aware of the known risk factors.

These include:

- Other types of abuse including financial
- Dependence on family member or carer
- Difficulties with language or communication
- Mental health issues
- Dementia or impaired capacity
- Alcohol or drug misuse
- Social isolation
- LGBTIQA+
- History of domestic and family violence
- Past trauma
- Disability
- Homelessness

What can you do?

If you suspect an older person is experiencing abuse, ask if anything has happened to make them feel upset or afraid. If an older person discloses sexual abuse, it is important to believe them.

LISTEN: to them carefully, with empathy and without judging.

RESPOND: with phrases like “I believe you” “Thank you for telling me” “It’s not your fault” “I’m sorry this happened to you”.

SAFETY: of the older person should be the focus. They should control decision making. Explore their needs and concerns to help find safe options.

SEEK: medical treatment if there are any injuries or immediate health concerns.

REPORT: to the police and any relevant health service providers. In an emergency call 000

SUPPORT: Centres Against Sexual Violence are for older people too. Information, counselling, and support is available.

To discuss available options:

Elder Abuse Prevention Unit 1300 651 192

ELSA

Elder Sexual Abuse

LISTEN • BELIEVE • ACT



What is elder sexual abuse?

Elder Sexual Abuse (ELSA) is any unwanted sexual behaviour, language, or activity that makes an older person feel uncomfortable, frightened, or threatened. It is about power not sex.

It can be anything sexual that a person does not consent to. This includes when a person is afraid, sedated, asleep or has a disability that makes it difficult to understand what is happening.

ELSA can happen to anyone. Most victims are women; however men can be victims too. The offender is often a partner, son, grandson, family member, carer or worker.

ELSA includes rape and sexual assault and other behaviours such as:

- Repeatedly making explicit sexual remarks
- Forcing someone to look at sexual pictures or videos
- Photographing a person's body or private parts without permission
- Looking for excuses to perform unnecessary cleaning and/or treatment of a person's private parts

Why talk about it?

ELSA can be hidden by shame and secrecy. That doesn't mean it's not real or that it's rare.

Knowing that this does happen and that there are people who will listen, can help an older person speak out.



A person may have been living with abuse for decades without being able to name it as abuse. This is more complicated if the abuser is also their carer. It is estimated that a third of victims over 60 years were still living with their abuser when seeking help.

Having regular conversations with an older person about their wellbeing can show you care. This ongoing interest in their lives may make them feel safe enough to speak about more difficult issues in the future.

What are the signs?

There are many signs that ELSA is occurring. These can be physical or behavioural.

Be aware of the following signs:

- Appearing overwhelmed, anxious, or afraid
- Withdrawal from people and activities previously enjoyed
- Injuries that don't match the explanations
- Problems walking or sitting
- Recent incontinence (bladder or bowel)
- Bruising to the body
- Sleep disturbances
- Sudden changes in mood
- Self-harm
- Torn or stained underwear
- Fear of a specific individual or location
- Sexually transmitted infection (STI)

Remember, abuse may occur without any signs and sometimes the signs may be caused by something other than abuse.