



Tool 1.10: Red flags

There are a number of behavioural indicators of abuse that may suggest a person is being abused without indicating how the abuse is occurring. This list has been adapted from Brandl (2004).¹²

Note: The presence of one or more indicators of abuse does not necessarily mean abuse has occurred. Indicators of abuse are not always obvious and can vary.

| An older person may: | A potential abuser may: |
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| Have injuries that don't match explanations given. | Minimise or deny the abuse has occurred. |
| Have repeated injuries or bruises and call them "accidental injuries". | Blame the older person for being clumsy or difficult. |
| Appear withdrawn, sullen or non-communicative. | Be overly charming and/or helpful to the worker OR abusive when questioned. |
| Express or hint at being afraid. | Act lovingly towards the older person in the presence of others. |
| Consider or attempt suicide, abuse drugs and/or alcohol, and exhibit signs of depression. | Coerce or make threats such as self-harm or to withdraw affection, access to grandchildren, place in aged care or hurt the family pet. |
| Present as "difficult", not wishing to answer questions. | Want to be present for all interviews. |
| Have vague, chronic, non-specific complaints. | Answer for the older person. |
| Frequently missed appointments with professionals or is unable to follow through on a treatment plan. | Portray the older person as incompetent, unhealthy or suffering a mental health problem or dementia. |
| Delay or not seek medical help. | Agrees to a treatment plan but doesn't follow through and is reluctant to explain why. |
| Exhibit evidence of stress or trauma such as chronic pain or illness. | Threatens to deny access to medicines or services or withholds information. Prohibits older person from seeking help. |
| Not seem to know their rights or be aware of their medical plans. | Prohibits the older person from purchasing items they want or need. |
| Be unsure or worried about their money; cancel services; lack necessary items in the house; or suddenly be unable to buy food or other items. | Turn family members against the older person. |
| Complain about their situation or appear unhappy. | Expresses interest or a right to the older person's money and assets such as living in the house, not wishing to accept services or have the older person moved to residential care. |
| Talk about family arguments or dysfunction or not see family. | Talks about how good the older person has it and how ungrateful they are. |
| Withdraw from social networks or decline to attend social occasions. | Turns family members against older person. Refuses to support social interaction. |

¹² Brandl, B. *Assessing for abuse in later life*, NCALL Coordinator, National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life (NCALL), a project of the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2004.