



Tool 1.9: Effective questioning: tips and suggestions

This tool explores a range of effective questions that demonstrate support to an older person where abuse is suspected or indicators are present. Open questions cannot easily be given a 'yes' or 'no' answer and are non-judgemental. Questions about family relationships and caring roles may bring up family or other tensions and abuse. A way to start can be to ask about how things are at home and how they spend their days.

Key considerations

- Might the presence of others effect disclosure? Privacy is important; talk to the person alone.
- Does the person have sensory deficits? Ensure glasses and hearing aids are used and eliminate background noises. Ensure the area is well lit. Arrange seating face-to-face, use familiar words and repeat questions.
- Are reactions slowed? Allow extra time for responding and pace questions.
- Are questions culturally sensitive? Where English is a second language, offer the use of professional interpreters. Ensure that you speak clearly and avoid jargon.
- Is it feasible to talk to the person in their own home? Most older people feel safer in familiar surroundings, and the living situation can also be observed.¹¹

11 'Elder Abuse & Neglect', *Family violence intervention guidelines*, New Zealand Ministry of Health, 2007.

Effective questions

Open questions: use to initiate conversations	Direct questions: use when abuse is strongly suspected
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are things going at home? • How do you spend your days? • How do you feel about the amount of help you receive at home? • How do you feel your carer/family is managing? • How are you managing financially? • How do you feel when carer/family member does/says (name behaviour noticed)? • Lots of women put up with abuse and it can be hard to talk about. Does this sound like your situation? • What is happening now/how can I support you? • I noticed a bruise on your arm today. How did this happen? • You seem a little upset - what's happening for you? • How are you managing at home? (Or how is your carer managing?) • What would you like to do about your situation? • You seem anxious about your finances. What would it be like if I arranged someone to assist you with your banking etc.? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you feeling safe? • Are you afraid of anyone at home? • Has anyone close to you tried to hurt or harm you recently? • Are you often sad or lonely? • Are you helping to support someone? • Has anyone touched you without consent? • Has anyone shouted at you or threatened you? • Has anyone taken anything that was yours without your consent? • Have you signed any documents that you didn't understand? • Has anyone failed to help you when you needed help? • Is there someone you can talk to about your situation? • Would you like me to talk to someone who can help or advise you? • Would you like to have a visit from one of our social staff? • Has anyone tried to hurt you recently? • Do you know about a free telephone service called the NSW Elder Abuse Helpline - would you like the number?

Less appropriate questions

Do you feel as though you can't trust anyone in your family?

This is a leading question that is not very clear and is based on an assumption. A better question may be to ask who in their family the older person can confide in.

Why don't you tell your son not to talk to you that way?

“Why” questions should be avoided. This question is confronting and judgemental. For many reasons, the older person may find it difficult to confront her son. They may feel fearful, disempowered or protective. A better question may be to acknowledge that you noticed their son talking to them in an abusive manner and ask how they feel about the situation, if they need support or what they may want to do about their situation. Empowering the older person and reminding them what their rights are is important.

Why haven't you got any food in the fridge?

This question could be changed to a statement followed by an open question: “I noticed you don't have any food in your fridge. What happened?”

Where has your antique clock gone - it was there last week?

This question could be reworded to include a less confrontational approach. “I noticed that your antique clock has gone. What happened?”

You shouldn't put up with this - why don't you do something about it?

Make a statement based on observation. Let the older person know that there is support available to stop and prevent the abuse in a non-judgemental, non-confrontational way.

Are you feeling afraid at home?

This questions could be reworded to a statement based on observations rather than conclusions: “You seem fearful today” or “Are you feeling safe?”.