

Protecting adults

Protecting vulnerable adults

Protecting adults at risk is a priority for all local authorities across England and Wales. It is frequently referred to as 'safeguarding' adults.

A vulnerable adult is a person aged 18 or over who may be unable to take care of themselves or protect themselves from harm or from being exploited. This could be someone with a learning disability, a mental health issue, or someone living with dementia.

What defines adult abuse?

Abuse is mistreatment by any other person or group of people that violates a person's human and civil rights. It can vary, from treating someone with disrespect in a way which significantly affects the person's quality of life, to causing actual physical suffering.

Forms of abuse include:

- Physical.
- Sexual.
- Psychological.
- Emotional.
- Financial.

It could also cover the issues of neglect, including self-neglect, and institutional abuse – where the abuse affects more than one person within an organisation and is not addressed by the service's management.

If you suspect abuse, but you aren't sure if it is a recognised form of abuse, visit the NHS website which gives detailed descriptions and examples of each type of abuse. The Action on Elder Abuse website may also help with spotting the abuse of an older person.

Where does abuse happen?

Abuse can happen anywhere – at home, in a care home or a care home with nursing, a hospital, in the workplace, at a day centre or educational establishment, in supported housing or in the street.

The person who is responsible for the abuse may be known to the person abused and could be:

- a paid carer or volunteer;
- a health worker, social care or other worker;
- a relative, friend or neighbour;
- another resident or service user;
- an occasional visitor or someone who is providing a service; or
- someone who deliberately exploits vulnerable people.

What should I do if I suspect abuse?

If you think someone is being abused call Adult Social Care. Your concerns will be taken seriously and will receive prompt attention, advice and support. Adult Social Care will also arrange for an advocate to support you if needed. If you believe somebody is at risk of immediate harm, contact the police on 999.

You can also:

- Contact the Care Quality Commission (CQC) if the vulnerable adult is living in a registered care home, care home with nursing or receiving home care services.
- Let a public service professional, such as a social worker, community nurse, GP, probation officer or district nurse know your concerns. They have responsibilities under the county's adult protection procedure and can advise you about what to do next.

The Disclosure and Barring Service

There is a barring system for all those intending to work or are working with children and vulnerable adults.

The Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) and the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA) merged into the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS). CRB checks are now called DBS checks.

The DBS provides a joined up, seamless service combining the criminal records checking and barring functions. These details will be published on the DBS website. For disclosure information and services, visit the DBS homepage.

Care home owners, home care agencies and employment agencies which supply care workers are required to request checks as part of a range of pre-employment checks.

Care providers and suppliers of care workers are also required to refer workers to the DBS where, in their view, the individual has been guilty of misconduct. It is an offence for an employer or voluntary organisation knowingly to employ a barred person in a regulated activity role.

