

THE NORTH WEST CHILDREN'S SUPPORT GROUP



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PROTECTION OF VULNERABLE ADULTS

(Guidelines to Safeguarding)

The North West Children's Support group occasionally provides services to disabled young adults; many of whom can be vulnerable and may become victims of abuse. The charity has both a legal and moral responsibility to ensure that all volunteers across the organisation are aware of what to do if they suspect that someone is being abused.

What is abuse of a vulnerable adult?

Abuse is the violation of an individual's human and civil rights by another person or other people. It includes harm that is done to someone as well as neglect of their needs. Abuse can make a person's life unbearable. All abuse is serious and should never be overlooked.

Who is vulnerable?

All adults can be vulnerable given a certain situation. A vulnerable adult is anyone, 18 years or older who needs or may need care or support services because of a mental or other disability, or because of advanced age or illness. He or she may not, or is unable to take care of him or herself. They may as a result be unable to protect themselves from others harming or exploiting them.

There are many different types of abuse which include:

Physical abuse is an act of physical violence against a person, such as hitting, slapping, pushing and kicking. Usually this type of treatment leaves marks or bruising on the person's skin, however there are other forms of physical abuse that do not appear as violent or leave marks e.g. being given too much medication, holding someone down, the person being strapped to a chair against their will or being locked in a room etc.

Sexual abuse could mean obvious sexual violence such as rape and sexual assault. It could also mean more subtle behaviour such as someone being denied their sexual activity or being teased about their sexual characteristics etc.

Psychological abuse is any behaviour or spoken word that undermines the confidence and dignity of a person. This includes threats, isolation from social contact, humiliation, intimidation, swearing, shouting or unfair pressure to behave in a particular way etc.

Financial or material abuse includes the obvious behaviours such as stealing, fraud and exploitation. It could also mean pressure being exerted regarding wills, property, inheritance or financial transactions, the misuse of a person's property or belongings or benefits etc.

Neglect or acts of omission covers everything that should be done as part of supporting someone but was not, resulting in disadvantage to the person. Examples include ignoring medical advice or physical care needs and failure to provide access to services such as education or social services. Neglect could also mean depriving the person of their basic needs; medication, nutrition and heating etc.

Discriminatory abuse refers to a person being harassed, humiliated, treated unfairly or undermined because of their disability, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age or ethnicity

Institutional abuse occurs when routines in use mean that service users lose their independence and lifestyle to the needs of the service eg: lack of choice with meals, activities or times for getting up or going to bed.

Who might abuse a vulnerable adult?

Anyone may abuse a vulnerable adult.

- A member of staff or manager,
- A professional e.g. doctor
- A volunteer,
- Another Service User,
- A partner, relative or friend,
- A person doing an assessment e.g. social worker,
- A neighbour or stranger,
- A person who deliberately exploits vulnerable adults.

Where might the abuse take place?

In a care home or other service, the person's own home or the home of a family member, in the street, pub or other public place, on transport etc. **Abuse can take place anywhere!**

Why do people abuse?

There are a number of reasons:

- The culture in an organisation might mean that staff and volunteers follow the other people in treating the Service Users in an abusive way.
- Sometimes people who have little control over their own lives take control over other people's lives in an abusive way
- Some people may abuse for their own sexual gratification, or they might be seeking financial gain
Sometimes it could be a 'one off' event because a care worker is stressed or tired.

Why are disabled people more vulnerable to abuse?

They may rely on someone for personal/intimate care.

They might be concerned that if they make a complaint then they won't receive any care or support.

Sometimes disabled people become so used to being abused that they see it as normal.

If they have limited communication, it might be difficult to tell anyone about the abuse.

A disabled person might have contact with a limited number of people.

A disabled person might have to live in a care home or other establishment, where they could be subject to institutional abuse.

How might I recognise abuse?

You might notice:

- bruises or marks
- changes in eating habits
- being fearful
- inappropriate touching
- uncharacteristic sexual behaviour
- any change in behaviour
- constant hunger
- poor hygiene
- running out of money
- possessions disappearing
- looking depressed and withdrawn
- low self-esteem

Your responsibility is to report your concern – it is the responsibility of others to decide what to do with your information.

Why should I pass information on?

You should pass information on because:

- you have a responsibility to the young person
- People have the right to be safe
- there might be other information you may not be aware of
- abuse may have a lasting effect
- to prevent future harm
- abuse often continues because others cannot believe that the abuser would do this and are too afraid to speak out

REMEMBER – it is too easy to think that 'it's none of our business'. Adult protection often involves gathering information from a variety of sources to build up a picture of the service user's situation. You may hold a vital piece of evidence.

Remember that when you take on the responsibility to be a NWCSG volunteer you are implicitly and explicitly agreeing to act in a young person's best interest.

If you suspect that a young person is being abused or if abuse is disclosed to you:

Do: Report your concerns to the holiday leaders

Do: Write down your concerns when asked to do so

Do: Remember information is sensitive - don't gossip

Do: Avoid confronting the people involved

Do: Act quickly

Don't : Leave it for someone else to report

To prevent abuse from happening, in your behaviour with young people you should:

- Follow all NWCSG policies and procedures
- Place the safety and welfare of the young people above all other considerations
- Treat all young people with respect
- Be aware that your actions could be misinterpreted and that you are accountable
- Avoid developing more personal relationships with the young people
- Hold professional boundaries
- Report and record all suspicions or disclosures of abuse

You should not:

- Engage with inappropriate physical and social contact with young people
- Develop more intimate relationships with young people
- Either exaggerate or trivialise possible abuse issues
- Ignore the situation
- Agree to keep secrets