



BREAKING THE SILENCE

A Newsletter of Family Service Association of Toronto's Elder Abuse Consultation Team

Issue 1

• November, 2002

Elder Abuse Consultation Team

The Elder Abuse Consultation Team (EACT) responds to complex elder abuse cases by working with community agencies in an advisory capacity to provide respectful options that can improve the situation of older adults and allow them the right to live in a safe environment. The Team's goals include:

- Assisting with difficult cases
- Developing statistical profiles on the types of cases presented to the team
- Tracking the results of suggested options
- Being aware of cultural issues in the determination of options
- Developing evidence-based material to support others in similar situations
- Providing advice between team meetings
- Reporting the activities of the team to various stakeholders

Ontario's Strategy to Combat Elder Abuse

During the spring of this year, the Ministry of Citizenship and Culture and the Ministry of the Attorney General announced that \$4.3 million had been made available for a provincial strategy that would address and prevent abuse of seniors in Ontario. We applaud the Ontario government for their recognition of this pressing social issue.

The EACT, the first of its kind in Toronto, has a similar goal to that of the Ontario government's Strategy to Combat Elder Abuse. It works to coordinate available expert resources in the Toronto area and provide education to front-line service providers through monthly meetings, interim consultations and education sessions.

Members of the team include a lawyer, Crown Attorney, nurse, geriatrician, social workers, domestic violence worker, a member of the faith community, addictions and mental health worker, a Community Care Access Centre representative, senior volunteers, housing and financial sector representatives and more.

Family Service Association of Toronto, through the Innovations Fund, currently funds the EACT until March, 2003. This fund was developed to foster creative new ideas among staff at Family Service Association of Toronto. It is a way of continuing to support and strengthen the individuals and families the agency serves.

The EACT is urgently in need of stable funding for this important work to continue. If you would like to make a personal donation or you can provide corporate support please contact Bruce Maddox, Director of Development, at 416 595 9230 ext. 289 or brucema@fsatoronto.com.

If you would like to discuss a situation where you suspect or know an older adult is being abused, contact Lisa Manuel, EACT Coordinator at 416 977 0559 ext. 333 or lisama@fsatoronto.com.

What is Elder Abuse?

Elder abuse is any action or inaction by self or others that jeopardizes the health or well-being of an older adult. This includes physical, emotional, psychological, financial, sexual, or medication abuse as well as passive or active neglect and denial of civil or human rights. The abuse typically occurs with a person in a position of trust.

Many acts of abuse are criminal offenses; none are acceptable.

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is any physical pain or injury that is willfully inflicted upon a person, unreasonable confinement or punishment that results in physical harm.

Physical abuse may be manifested in many forms. This includes, but is not limited to:

- direct beatings
- hair pulling
- hitting
- physical coercion
- slapping
- physical restraint
- punching
- pushing

A person may experience some of the following symptoms as a result of being physically abused:

- cuts
- welts
- bruises
- unexplained hair loss
- burns
- broken or healing bones
- weight loss
- anger
- injury that is inconsistent with the reason given

Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse, also known as psychological abuse or chronic verbal aggression, is the willful infliction of mental anguish or the provocation of fear, violence or isolation. It diminishes the identity, dignity and self-worth of the person.

Emotional abuse may be manifested in many forms. This includes, but is not limited to:

- threats
- humiliation
- verbal assaults
- treating the older person like a child
- intimidation
- blaming
- isolation
- yelling for no reason

A person may experience some of the following symptoms as a result of being emotionally abused:

- a feeling of helplessness
- depression
- fear
- unwillingness to talk openly
- withdrawal
- anger
- denial
- low self-esteem
- nervousness in front of a particular person

Thinking Through Working with Abused Older Adults:

Do you suspect someone you know is being abused but are unsure how to approach the issue with that individual?

Every situation of abuse is different. There are no set list of questions that can be asked to determine if an individual is being

abused. However, asking direct questions often gets direct answers. Even if a person does not honestly answer the first time, you are signaling to him/her that you are a person willing to discuss their concerns when they are ready to do so.

If there are indicators of abuse such as the ones listed on page two, questions can be asked such as:

- ◆ Has anyone hit you, pinched you hard, pulled your hair, threatened you, called you names, put you down?
- ◆ Who makes decisions in your home?
- ◆ Has anyone taken things that belong to you without your approval?
- ◆ Who makes decisions about your life, such as how you should live or where you should live?
- ◆ Does anyone ever threaten to send you to a nursing home?

Another suggestion is stating, “What you are experiencing is not ok. It is abuse. No one has the right to do this to you”. By naming the behaviours as abuse, it may help people to eventually be able to name the abuse themselves.

When a person has been deemed incapable or you suspect they may not be cognitively intact, it may be more difficult to determine if the individual is being abused. A suggestion in overcoming this obstacle is to assess the behaviors or “cues” of the alleged abuser.

This means observing if the alleged abuser is very controlling with regards to the individual, thus possibly answering their questions for them, not letting them speak, or speaking above the person. For example, the alleged abuser may say the

individual is crazy and doesn't know what they are talking about.

It is also important to observe how the individual acts in the presence of the alleged abuser. Does he/she look at the abuser as if in permission to speak, seems very meek, withdrawn, eyes averted downwards, etc.

Remember - a diagnosis of Alzheimer Disease or other related dementia's does not always make a person incapable of discussing abusive behaviors.

Case Example of Abuse:

Mrs. S is an 80-year old woman who experiences physical abuse in her home. She has been married to her husband for 55 years. Mrs. S has endured countless years of being told that she is stupid, worthless, and doesn't know how to do anything right. When she tried to defend herself, she was beaten severely. She is now confined to a wheelchair as a result of her injuries. As a result, she is very quiet and withdrawn. She is constantly in physical pain, feels inadequate, and thinks she is a failure.

Mrs. S has suffered several strokes in the past year. When the most recent stroke occurred, Mrs. S was taken to the hospital where she was deemed incapable of making personal care decisions. Her husband then used a Power of Attorney for Personal Care and discharged Mrs. S from the hospital, against medical advice. He also told hospital staff that he would never let anyone into his home to help them out and he would never ask for medical assistance for his wife again.

Most individuals, who suffer from abuse, do not endure one form but rather several types. But what can be done to help people like Mrs. S?

Intervention Strategies

Are you a friend, family member or professional working with an older person who is being abused and are unsure as to how you can help? The following are a few suggestions:

- *Let the person know the behaviors associated with this type of abuse are NOT acceptable, regardless of the person's ethno-cultural or religious background, age or upbringing..*
- *Develop a safety plan with the abused older adult.*
- ◆ Establish where to go if the person senses danger (i.e. a friend, neighbor, lobby of apartment). If the person is not able to go somewhere, they can arrange with a neighbor to knock a certain way on the wall to indicate they need help (i.e. knock three times)
- ◆ Rehearse how the person will do this (i.e. leave behind belongings except for a bag packed at the front door; call 911)
- ◆ Pack a change of clothes, medications and all important documents such as cheque book, health card, immigration papers, credit cards, social insurance number in a grocery bag and place close to the front door for easy access (Do so only if unobtrusive and safe).
- ◆ Alternatively, store clothes and documents with a friend, neighbour, family member etc.
- ◆ Stress the importance of NOT telling the alleged abuser about the plan.
- *Involve a Community Relations Officer.*

These non-uniform police officers work to establish ongoing communication between organizations and agencies that deal with

the community, and they assist communities experiencing problems through referrals, intervention, and investigation. Community Relations Officers also coordinate solutions for community concerns, and provide information to the public about elder abuse through lectures, pamphlets, and displays. To contact a Community Relations Officer in Toronto, dial 416 808 the Division number then 00 – for example, Police Division 99, dial 416 808 9900 then ask to speak to a Community Relations Officer.

- *Make an application to the Consent and Capacity Board.*

The Board “is an independent body created by the provincial government. It conducts hearings under the Mental Health Act, the Health Care Consent Act, the Substitute Decisions Act and the Long Term Care Act”. “A health practitioner or the person who is responsible for authorizing admissions to the care facility or for providing the personal assistance services” (i.e. Physician or Community Care Access Centre), can make an application to the Board. This course of action may be taken if the older person is deemed incapable and it is questionable whether their Power of Attorney or Substitute Decision-Maker is acting in the best interests of the older person. More information is available at www.ccboard.on.ca

- *Determine if community resources are being utilized.*

There are services available to help older persons remain connected with their community. These services can be accessed through contacting a local community support agency, a Community Care Access Centre or Family Service Association of Toronto. For the local community support agency in your neighborhood, dial 211, or if living outside of Toronto, call the Ontario Community Support Association at 416 256 3010, or

1-800-267-OCSA (6272), or online at www.ocsa.on.ca.

- *Provide counselling for the older person to increase their self-esteem.*

This form of counselling can help the individual change the way they think, feel, and act. Education and counselling can also include helping the older person understand how this change can develop into a cycle of behavior (i.e. If you think positively, you begin to feel more positive, and then you begin to act in a more positive and purposeful manner.)

Services at Family Service Association of Toronto: Seniors and Caregivers Support Services

You can count on us to help you get the support you need. We'll help you:

- ◆ deal with an abusive relationship
- ◆ learn to cope with difficult medical conditions like Alzheimer Disease, Stroke and Depression
- ◆ learn to live with change and loss
- ◆ access community support services such as day programs and meals-on-wheels
- ◆ speak out and make an impact on issues that affect your quality of life

Educational workshops are offered on a variety of subjects for caregivers. Examples include:

- ◆ Aging and Memory Loss
- ◆ Stress Management
- ◆ Anger and Guilt
- ◆ Coping with Caregiver Stress
- ◆ Talking with your doctor
- ◆ Choosing a Nursing Home
- ◆ Family Dynamics
- ◆ Spirituality and Caregiving
- ◆ Future Planning
- ◆ Long Distance Caregiving

The following groups are offered at various times throughout the year:

- ◆ Taking Control of Your Life: A Support Group for Abused Older Women
- ◆ Bereavement Support Group
- ◆ Caregiver Support Group
- ◆ BOOST – A Support Group for Isolated Older Women

Services are provided free of charge with the exception of Saturday workshops. To find out more please call 416 595 9618 or email sau@fsatoronto.com. This program available to older adults (60+), those with disabilities (50+), or caregivers of any age who live or work in Toronto, regardless of race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, disability, level of literacy, marital or family status, income or political affiliation. Services are available in a variety of languages and at several locations throughout Toronto.

Elder Abuse Training

- Do you know how to work with seniors who find themselves in abusive situations and their alleged abusers?
- Do you know how to access the justice system, shelters and other resources?
- Do you have policies in place to deal with abuse of your older clients?

If you have answered “no” to any of the above, the Elder Abuse Consultation Team is available to provide FREE in-house training to organizations, teams, seniors groups and other interested parties on elder abuse located in the Toronto area.

If you are interested in a possible training session, contact Lisa Manuel at lisama@fsatoronto.com or 416 977 0559 ext. 333.

Upcoming meetings of the Elder Abuse Consultation Team

2002

Friday November 18
Friday December 13

2003

Friday January 24
Friday February 21
Friday March 21
Friday April 25
Friday May 25
Friday June 20
Friday July 18
Friday August 22
Friday September 19
Friday October 17
Friday November 14
Friday December 12

To present a case to the team, contact Lisa Manuel, EACT Team Leader at the contacts listed on this page.

Related Web Site Links

Family Service Association of Toronto
www.fsatoronto.com

Ontario Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse
www.onpea.org

Seniors Safety
www.seniorssafety.com

CLSC Rene-Cassin
www.geronto.org

National Centre on Elder Abuse (American)
www.preventelderabuse.org

National Committee for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (American)
www.preventelderabuse.org

How are we doing?

This is the first newsletter of the Elder Abuse Consultation Team. We are eager for your feedback. If you would like to comment on the content or make suggestions for future newsletters please contact us at:

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Thank you for your interest in elder abuse and helping to "Break the Silence".