



4. Case studies

About the cases

Case studies offer a lively way to get people talking about senior abuse. The case studies in this toolkit are not real-life examples, but they are based on situations that people often hear about when they are working with seniors. Most of the cases involve more than one issue and many possible responses. Some of the issues raised in some cases are complex and troubling. Choose the cases that you feel comfortable and confident discussing.

You can use the cases in different ways, depending on your own comfort with the material, the size of the group you are working with, and how much time you have. For example:

- Do a quick study when you have limited time or space for discussion, or if you prefer the shorter stories.
- Use the longer cases when you have more time, when there is space to break into small groups for deeper discussions, and when you want more details in the stories.
- Feel free to experiment with your own ways to use these resources.

Getting ready

Decide ahead of time whether you will do a quick study or a combination of the longer cases. Then decide how you will involve the participants. Will you work as one large group or break into smaller groups?

If you want to distribute handouts, choose the handouts and decide how many copies you will need. Use the master copies in pockets 2 and 3 for photocopying. Copies are also available online at gov.ns.ca/seniors/stopabuse. If you need a new master copy and don't have access to the internet, the Department of Seniors will send you a reprint. See the contact information on page 56.

Doing a quick study

There are three quick study handouts: A, B, and C. Each handout includes six brief stories—one for each of the six types of abuse.

Choose one of the three handouts for your event.

Do one of the following:

- Photocopy the handout for each participant or each small group; *or*
- Plan to read each story aloud from your copy; *or*
- Create a slide for each story so that you can project the stories one at a time onto a screen.

Whichever method you use, be sure to read each story aloud. Better yet, invite a participant to read the story to the group. After each story, briefly discuss the questions on the handout.

Using the longer cases

Here is one way to use the longer cases.

- Divide into small groups and assign a different case to each group. Allow the groups time to read the cases aloud, do the steps, and discuss the issues.
- Circulate through the room and check in with each group to get a sense of their discussion.
- Ask the small groups to report back to the large group. Allow time for the large group to share their ideas and offer any suggestions they might have.

Guiding the discussion

The people who participate in your event might have very different ideas about the issues and what to do about them. Encourage them to say what they think. Be respectful of diverse viewpoints, but remember these tips:

- Be prepared to bring the focus of the discussion back to the three guiding principles of safety, respect, and self determination. Ask the participants: *What information or support could you offer to the older adult to help them make an informed decision?*
- Keep the group focused on the facts presented in the cases. Remind them not to jump to conclusions. It is not their role to “fix” the situation, but to think about how they could support the older adult to make their own informed decision.

Participants may say there isn’t enough information to judge the cases. That’s true. The goal of the discussion isn’t to make a judgement. It’s an opportunity to practice the two steps outlined in the presentation: SEE it! CHECK it!





Here are some questions that may help you support the discussion. Always ask the group to share their ideas before offering any of your own.

1. **SEE it!** Ask the group to underline the warning signs in the case—for example, look for signs of dependence, manipulation, fear, misuses of power, or addiction.

For general warning signs, see page 5 in the booklet, *Understanding Senior Abuse: Facts, Tips, Contacts*.

Ask the group for their perspective:

- Is it abuse?
- Is it clearly one kind of abuse or possibly a combination?
- Would anyone hesitate to name the abuse? If so, why?

Encourage the participants to name their reasons. Ask them to look at those reasons from another point of view. What would make them overcome their hesitation to help?

If the discussion stalls, see page 6 in the booklet, *Understanding Senior Abuse: Facts, Tips, Contacts*.



Remind the participants that small steps count. Encourage them to imagine small steps they could take.

2. **CHECK it!** What could a bystander ask the older adult? For example:

- What's happening?
- How can I help?
- I'm concerned about your rights and options.
- Do you know about...(supports in the community, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, job help, credit counselling)?
- Do you know about safety planning? Do you know where to get help to create a safety plan?

For tips on safety planning, see page 9 in the booklet, *Understanding Senior Abuse: Facts, Tips, Contacts*.



Quick Study A

SEE it!

Underline the warning signs in the following cases.
Check off the type(s) of abuse that could be happening.

CHECK it!

What questions could you ask? What help might be available?

	Financial	Emotional	Rights & Freedoms	Sexual	Neglect	Physical
A1. My granddaughter moved in with me some time ago. I asked her to leave because she used my bank card to take money from my account a couple of times. She said she has no place to go. I feel guilty and let her stay, but I am afraid she will do it again.						
A2. I don't have a big family and have outlived most of my friends. My niece is the only family member I see regularly. She says I'm lazy and should be thankful that she takes time to visit me.						
A3. I used to get lots of mail when I lived on my own. But it stopped when I moved in with my son. I asked him about it. He said that hardly any mail comes for me, and when something does come, he opens and takes care of it.						
A4. My husband has always been very controlling. He has never hit me, but lately he pressures me for sex. He won't let me sleep until I give in.						
A5. My son suffered a brain injury when he was young and he has lived with me his whole life. He does help more now that I am no longer able to get around very well, but my daughter expects him to do everything and he just can't. She lives nearby but is very busy. I haven't been able to get out for groceries for over a week this time.						
A6. My younger brother and I live together. He has always had a temper. Recently when he was drinking, he pushed me against the wall a couple of times.						

The Government of Nova Scotia thanks the Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women and Children at the University of Western Ontario for permission to adapt material from their public education campaign, "It's Not Right! Neighbours, Friends and Families for Older Adults" (www.neighboursfriendsandfamilies.ca). The original campaign was supported by the Public Health Agency of Canada through the Federal Elder Abuse Initiative.



Quick Study B

SEE it!

Underline the warning signs in the following cases.
Check off the type(s) of abuse that could be happening.

CHECK it!
What questions could you ask? What help might be available?

	Financial	Emotional	Rights & Freedoms	Sexual	Neglect	Physical
<p>B1. Last week, my son-in-law asked me to sign a power of attorney so that he could help with my affairs. He disagrees with the way I manage my money, and I have heard him tell my daughter that he thinks I am getting senile. I am a little afraid of him.</p>						
<p>B2. My wife laughs at me in front of people because I can't manage zippers and buttons without her help. She tells people that I am "worse than a child" and that she would never let herself be so helpless.</p>						
<p>B3. My children are angry that I have made some large donations to a religious organization I support. I have overheard them say that they should "do something" to keep me away from the "religious fanatics." These people are not fanatics—they are my friends.</p>						
<p>B4. My neighbour is a widower who brings my groceries because we both live so far out of town. Since my husband died he has started hugging and touching me even though I ask him not to. He calls it his "delivery fee."</p>						
<p>B5. I live in the basement of my brother's house. He is very successful and travels a lot. When he goes away he locks me in. He says he is afraid that I will wander off. Even though he leaves food and things to read, I get very depressed if he is gone for more than a couple of days.</p>						
<p>B6. Mr. K has dementia and sometimes gets upset in the evening. He lives in a nursing home where workers are under a lot of pressure to get everything done for everyone on the floor. Mr. K will often follow the staff around, asking for them to take him home. He is given medication to calm him down so that the workers can tend to everyone else.</p>						

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Quick Study C

SEE it!

Underline the warning signs in the following cases.
Check off the type(s) of abuse that could be happening.

CHECK it!

What questions could you ask? What help might be available?

	Financial	Emotional	Rights & Freedoms	Sexual	Neglect	Physical
<p>C1. My younger sister lives with me since her husband died. I have worked hard and saved money for many years. She has threatened to end our relationship if I don't write a new will that leaves all of my savings to her.</p>						
<p>C2. My husband controls my every move. He tells me I am "too stupid" to make decisions or handle money. He won't let me see my friends anymore.</p>						
<p>C3. My health is getting worse, and so I decided to move to a nursing home. I thought I had asked all the right questions to be sure this was right for me. I didn't know the schedule was so strict. I can't sleep in, or eat a little later, or say no to a bath, or stay up to watch a show.</p>						
<p>C4. My nephew and his girlfriend live with me. They have sex anywhere they please and don't close the door even when I am home. I have asked them repeatedly to be more private, but they laugh at me and call me a prude.</p>						
<p>C5. My friend and I have lived together for ten years. My knees are bad and I haven't been able to share the chores recently. She is angry about this and refuses to clean my part of the house or prepare food for me. She hasn't spoken to me in three weeks. I don't speak English very well and have no one else to talk to.</p>						
<p>C6. I am not as independent as I used to be. I need help with certain tasks. My son helps me, but I am ashamed to admit that sometimes he shakes me and even hits me.</p>						

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Case 1:

Mrs. Scott

The following case is not a true story, but is based on situations that people often hear about when they are working with senior abuse cases.

Mrs. Scott (75 years old) lives in rural Nova Scotia. Her oldest daughter, Joyce (54 years old), moved back home five years ago, after Mrs. Scott's husband died. Over the past year, Joyce lost her job and started drinking more than usual. Mrs. Scott is very worried about her daughter. She depends on her to go to the grocery store, her doctor's appointments, and card night at the local recreation centre.

When Joyce's car broke down and couldn't be repaired, she asked her mother to co-sign a loan for her new car. Joyce convinced her mother that it was the only way she could get a car. And without a car, Joyce wouldn't be able to continue to help her with her errands. Joyce also convinced Mrs. Scott to apply for credit cards to help her through this rough time without work. Mrs. Scott pays the credit card bills, but it is becoming a financial burden on her to continue to pay her daughter's debts.

Mrs. Scott doesn't want Joyce to be angry with her or to stop helping her, so she feels like she has to continue to support Joyce through this difficult time.

**Before you act,
ask yourself:**
What are the safety issues?
Am I being respectful?



1. SEE it!

*Do you see possible signs of abuse?
If so, what are the signs?*

What might be happening?

- Financial abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Violation of rights
- Sexual abuse
- Neglect
- Physical abuse

*Would you hesitate to name it? If so, why?
What would help you overcome your hesitation?*

2. CHECK it!

How could you check this situation? What might you ask? Who might you ask? What other help is available?

Case 2:

Mr. McInnis

The following case is not a true story, but is based on situations that people often hear about when they are working with senior abuse cases.

Mr. McInnis (79 years old) has been living in a nursing home for the past five years. He was a coal miner until the mine closed. He has emphysema and needs oxygen on a regular basis. His daughter Joan (59 years old) visits him weekly.

This week, Mr. McInnis told his daughter that Sally (24 years old), the night staff person, is very mean to him. He said that Sally yells at him if he asks for help to get to the washroom at night. Mr. McInnis told his daughter he is afraid to go to the washroom alone because he has to take the oxygen tank with him. He doesn't feel stable enough to get himself and the oxygen tank to the washroom without a fall.

Joan asked him if he has talked to the supervisor about Sally. He said he hasn't because he knows Sally is a single mother and needs this job to support her two small children. He said that he and Sally used to be very friendly, but that things have changed over the past few months. He's afraid if he says something that Sally might lose her job or, even worse, that things might get worse instead of better for him. He also told Joan that he is now having trouble sleeping. Joan is worried and not sure what to do.

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If so, what are the signs?*

What might be happening?

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- Physical abuse

*Would you hesitate to name it? If so, why?
What would help you overcome your hesitation?*

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Case 3:

John

The following case is not a true story, but is based on situations that people often hear about when they are working with senior abuse cases.

After experiencing a number of health problems, John (83 years old) has recently moved in with his son Pete and daughter-in-law Emily in an up-and-coming subdivision just outside of Halifax. In recent months, John has experienced a number of health concerns, including some falls and frequent problems remembering things. Doctors think John may be showing signs of dementia.

Lately, John has noticed that he has not been receiving his mail as he did when he lived by himself. John asked Pete if he has noticed anything about the missing mail. Pete assures John that when the mail is delivered to the mailbox at the end of their road, he makes sure to collect and open all of John's mail to ensure it is handled promptly. This makes John uneasy. He feels he is completely capable of dealing with his own mail and does not feel that Pete needs to do it for him. However, since he has recently moved in with Pete and is relying on Pete to help him with some of his day-to-day tasks, John is fearful of confronting his son and hurting his new living arrangement.

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What would help you overcome your hesitation?*

2. CHECK it!

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Case 4:

Jane

The following case is not a true story, but is based on situations that people often hear about when they are working with senior abuse cases.

Jane (72 years old) is a widow who is still very active in her community. She often takes part in social dinners and cards with the local seniors' group. Since her husband died, Billy (69 years old) has given her a lot of attention. He often asks her to travel to the events with him and sit with him. Jane misses the companionship of a man and would like to start dating again, but feels Billy is coming on too strong.

At the last dinner dance, Billy grabbed Jane's bottom and made a lewd comment. Jane was shocked and told him to leave her alone. Sandy (76 years old), Jane's friend, was standing right beside her when Billy grabbed her bottom. Sandy told Jane she was overreacting and that Billy didn't mean any harm. He was just having a good time. Jane left the event. She now feels embarrassed and doesn't want to attend any more events if Sandy or Billy will be there.

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Case 5:

Mr. Russell

The following case is not a true story, but is based on situations that people often hear about when they are working with senior abuse cases.

Mr. Russell (92 years old) lives with his friend Ted (72 years old) in a small, run-down house in Porter's Lake. They rarely leave the house and are fairly isolated. They don't have many close friends or neighbours nearby. Their 12 stray cats keep them company. Ted feeds the cats regularly and allows them to roam freely throughout the home.

The house is cluttered. The kitchen counters are covered with dirty dishes and unfinished food. The sink is always filled with dirty dishes.

Mr. Russell used to get regular visits from nurses who work for a local care provider. Recently however, the agency has refused to continue sending nurses to the property because they have deemed it unsanitary and unsafe for their nurses. The agency has contacted Public Health with their concerns.

Ted has made some attempts to clean up the house by purchasing two litter boxes, but they are rarely cleaned and often over full.

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If so, what are the signs?*

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- Financial abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Violation of rights
- Sexual abuse
- Neglect
- Physical abuse

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What would help you overcome your hesitation?*

2. CHECK it!

How could you check this situation? What might you ask? Who might you ask? What other help is available?

Case 6:

Margaret

The following case is not a true story, but is based on situations that people often hear about when they are working with senior abuse cases.

Margaret (68 years old) is a very active member of her community and participates in many groups and clubs. She has lots of friends and close neighbours. Her husband, Bob (68 years old), has been retired for three years, and was a well respected member of the business community throughout his career.

Since his retirement, Bob has had difficulty finding things to keep him busy. He can often be found at the Legion or golf club having a few drinks with friends. He regularly comes home drunk, starts a fight and hits Margaret for no reason. He always apologizes the next day and tells her that he loves her. He says if it weren't for her mistakes, he wouldn't have hit her.

Margaret has not disclosed this to anyone close to her. But last week at cards, her bridge partner, Pat, noticed a bruise on her wrist and asked Margaret what happened. Margaret said she was clumsy and banged her arm on the door. Pat is not sure she believes Margaret, but doesn't want to push for more information.

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