

# For Family and Friends

Are you worried a family member or friend is being harmed? Knowing that someone you care about is being harmed can be very difficult. You may feel helpless, frustrated, or fearful for them. It can be helpful to learn more about the [Dynamics of Abuse in Later Life](#) and understand some of the [Forms of Abuse](#) an individual might experience before reaching out to offer support and assistance.

## Ways to Help a Victim of Abuse in Later Life

Many victims of abuse in later life feel alone and ashamed as a result of the abuse. They may blame themselves for the abuse or feel they have nowhere to turn. They may also feel pressure from others not to reach out for help or fear no one will believe them.

## Start the Conversation

If you are concerned about an older adult and you wish to help, start by approaching them at a time and place that is safe and private. Let them know that you are concerned about them and that they do not deserve to be harmed. Let them know that you care for them, you respect them, and you are there to help. To get the conversation started, consider statements such as:

- I am concerned for your safety.
- No one deserves to be harmed.
- There are organizations that can help.
- I am here to help whenever you are ready and with whatever you might need

## If Someone Confides in You About Being Abused

It can be hard to learn that an older adult that you care about or love is being harmed. Keep in mind that they may choose to maintain contact with someone who is harming them and they may not be interested contacting anyone for assistance. They may be afraid of their abuser or of the consequences of reach out for help. It may take time for them to make a decision. If you are concerned about the person's safety, speak up, but remember, they may be the best judge of their circumstances.

Offer support to them without criticism. Acknowledge the strength and bravery it takes to talk about such a difficult topic. Let them know the abuse is not their fault and that you are there to support them. Let them know that help and safety is available.

Encourage them to reach out to victim service providers in your community who can assist them as they think through their options and develop strategies for staying safe. Offer to provide transportation or go with them for their first appointment.

Let them know they can call the [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) to get important information and talk confidentially to someone about their experience and available resources or contact the [Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network \(RAINN\)](#) to be connected with their local sexual abuse victim service program. Another resource to find local services is [NCALL's National Abuse in Later Life Directory](#).

Please note, the directory does not list all victim service programs for your area but only programs that have created specialized services for older victims of abuse. Most programs will be able to help whether or not they have specialized services. For information about all domestic or sexual abuse victim service programs, please call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or TTY 1-800-787-3224 or RAINN at 800-656-HOPE (4673).

If you feel the person is in immediate danger, contact 911. Also, if you are concerned that the older adult may not have the cognitive capacity to make decisions about the situation due to dementia or another medical condition, consider working with health care providers and adult protective services to help. Local aging services and Adult Protective Services can be found through [Elder Care Locator](#).

## Be Part of a Safety Plan

Consider working with the victim on a safety plan. Many domestic abuse victim service programs work with victims to create a safety plan, whether the victim chooses to stay with the person harming them or is planning on leaving. Often safety plans include a safe and trusted individual the victim can reach out to for support and help, someone who may call and check-in on the older victim on a regular basis. Discuss with the victim ways you can be a supportive person through a safety planning process.

## Take Care of Yourself

Supporting someone who is being harmed is not easy. Sometimes, being supportive of someone who is being harmed is a long and arduous process. Self-care is very important. Be sure to take care of yourself and have your own support system through this difficult process.

## Older Survivor Stories

Many older adults who are being harmed display amazing personal strength and courage during difficult times. Some older survivors are speaking out about their experiences to help other potential victims know that they are not alone and help is available. To hear directly from some older adults that were being harmed, please click any of the following links:

- [Survivor Story “The Day That Changed My Life Forever” by Mary](#)
- [I Can’t Believe I’m Free \(Pat’s Story\)](#)
- [I Can Hold My Head High \(Lois’ Story\)](#)
- [I’m Having to Suffer for What He Did \(Miss Mary’s Story\)](#)
- [The Ties That Bind \(Sam’s Story\)](#)
- [A Mother Never Gives Up Hope \(Anne’s Story\)](#)

