Elder Abuse Assessment Tool Kit

Breaking the Silence: Giving a Voice Back to Seniors

Produced By:

Durham Elder Abuse Network

in partnership with

Durham Regional Police Service
&
Region of Durham

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Developing this new Elder Abuse Assessment Tool Kit to assess elder abuse has been a wonderful learning experience. The process from beginning to end has heightened an awareness and sensitivity to addressing the needs of seniors experiencing abuse but unable to communicate their concerns to others.

The development of this Kit could not have been achieved without the support and commitment of seniors, community agencies and organizations from across Canada. We thank the hundreds of people who provided feedback on the Kit during the focus group sessions held across Canada including: Oshawa, Ontario; North Bay, Ontario, Winnipeg, Manitoba; St. John's, Newfoundland; Yellowknife, North West Territories; and Vancouver, British Columbia. Not only were these sessions a remarkable learning opportunity about communication strategies and techniques for seniors, they also provided us with a greater understanding of the cultural issues that need to be considered in screening for elder abuse.

We are truly grateful for everyone's participation in helping to organize, plan and contribute in focus group sessions, planning meetings and creating resource materials throughout this project. We also thank graphic artist, Melanie Duncan, for contributing her artistic skills to develop pictures to portray the emotions and images of elder abuse.

We are confident this Tool will bring a new perspective to those working with older adults with communication barriers and shift their thinking in how they look and respond to allegations of abuse involving non-verbal seniors.

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Table of Contents

acknowledgements **2**

Background. 5
Purpose Of The Tool Kit: 6
Who Should Use The Tool Kit? 6
How To Use The Tool Kit: 6
Interview Process: 7

Supplementary Interview Resources **7**
Pictures: 7
Video 8
Doll 9
Self Care 10

What Is Elder Abuse? **11**
Physical Abuse 11
Financial Abuse 12
Emotional Abuse 13
Verbal Abuse 14
Neglect 15
Self Neglect 16

Recommended Interview Questions **17**
Assessing Capacity 17
Sample Assessment Questions 18
Step 1: Beginning the Conversation 18
Step 2: Inquiring about the Abuser 21
Step 3: Reporting and/or Referral 22
Step 4: Safety Planning 22

Communication Tips with Older Adults When Utilizing the Tool Kit **24**

CONTENT OF PICTURES AND SYMBOLS **25**

Section 1 General Pictures 26

Section 2 Physical Abuse Tools 42

Section 3 Financial Abuse Tools 48

Section 4 Emotional/ Verbal Abuse Tools 56

Section 5 Sexual Abuse Tools 60

Section 6 Neglect Tools 62

Section 7 People 69

Section 8 Elder Abuse Assessment Form 74

Resources **80**

Elder Abuse Assessment Tool Kit

Background:

Elder Abuse it often referred to as the 'hidden crime' that seniors are reluctant to speak about. When elder abuse occurs many older adults have the capacity and ability to communicate their concerns but, for a variety of reasons such as shame, embarrassment, and fear they are reluctant to talk to anyone. When they are ready to disclose to someone that abuse is occurring, they have a voice to tell their story and social and community support are usually available to them when they disclose their concerns.

However, older adults who are capable but do not have a voice or, have difficulties in verbalizing words, creating a barrier for them to disclose abuse are often overlooked. This inability to speak may make health care providers, social service workers and police view the person as being frail, not competent and question their credibility when elder abuse is reported. These circumstances make it very difficult, if not impossible, for these older adults to report abuse.

A person who cannot speak does not necessarily have a hearing or cognitive problem. Older adults affected by a stroke, Parkinson's disease, ALS, and other disease processes which affect their ability to communicate, but not their mental capacity, are more vulnerable than their cohorts to elder abuse. If a person has limited or no ability to communicate verbally and is a victim of abuse, then what? A tool or strategy is required as a means to enable these older adults to communicate. Language is a major and critical component for obtaining the facts about a situation. Therefore, a specific communication tool for elder abuse assessment is needed.

Assisted and augmented communication strategies have been used for years to give a voice to people who have lost some or all of their ability to speak but are cognitively unimpaired to communicate with others. Prior to this Tool Kit, if an older adult was harmed or otherwise abused there were limited and often inappropriate tools to assist health and social service providers and police in assessing if elder abuse was occurring. In cases where there was a suspicion or allegation of elder abuse and the victim had communication challenges, how would a senior proceed in having their story told and their voice heard? The person investigating found themselves in a difficult situation - "How do I get the details?" It becomes very difficult to get the facts to verify the report and the senior's safety and well-being is compromised.

This Tool Kit enhances the ability to communicate specifically about issues related to safety and well-being, discuss and report situations where older adults are feeling at risk and/or being abused. The Tool aims to 'break the silence' and give older adults a voice.

Purpose of the Tool Kit:

The Tool Kit is intended to be used as an assessment *tool* for *elder abuse* for persons who have difficulty verbally communicating but are mentally competent and capable. The Kit is *not* intended to be used for investigation purposes but to obtain basic information about the alleged elder abuse situation and circumstances to verify if abuse has occurred.

The Kit focuses on communicating with the older adult to assess for alleged elder abuse using a variety of communication styles and techniques. The Kit can be used in any jurisdiction as it is not developed based on any particular legislative framework. If, through the assessment process elder abuse is detected, the interviewer should respond based on their provincial/territorial mandate. The Canadian Centre for Elder Law, A Division of the British Columbia Law Institute developed a document, *"A Practical Guide to Elder Abuse and Neglect Law in Canada"* which provides an overview of the legislative frameworks related to elder abuse in each jurisdiction. To access a copy of this document see:
http://www.bcli.org/sites/default/files/Elder_Abuse_Law_Practical_Guide.pdf

Who Should Use the Tool Kit?

Anyone who is working with an older adult who cannot speak or who has limitations to verbal communication can utilize this tool to do an assessment on cases of suspected and/or alleged elder abuse.

These agencies and sectors include, but are not limited to: home support services, hospitals, police, Adult Day Programs, community outreach services, long term care homes, retirement homes, senior centres, community health centres, therapists, clergy, family and friends, etc.

How to Use the Tool Kit:

You don't need special training to use this Tool however the instructions outlined on the following pages are straightforward and designed as a guide, not as a specific model. You might choose your questions differently based on the relationship you have with your client.

It is important to assess if the person is capable prior to using this Tool. If the person does not have mental capacity (or this is in question) it is important to speak to those who know the older adult, services providers and others who may have information about the suspected abuse. Ensuing the safety and wellbeing of the older adult is

imperative. In some cases, the police or adult protective agencies may be an appropriate referral to ensure the person accesses assistance.

This Tool was designed for older adults who have the mental capacity to make decisions. It is not expected that a formal capacity assessment or clinical assessment be completed prior to use. Depending on the jurisdiction in which you live, please refer to the legal definition of capacity that pertains to your province or territory and the relevant resources and legislation.

After establishing that a non-verbal older adult may have a story to tell about an allegation of abuse and, you have a determination of their capacity, the Tool Kit can help you assess the situation.

Interview Process:

A person may become aware of an alleged elder abuse case through staff, family members, an agency or the senior themselves. When concerns come forward, the interviewer should make arrangements to find a location that is quiet and free from distractions to conduct the interview with the senior. If the senior resides in a long term care facility, find a room away from others where he/she feels safe and comfortable. It is important to respect confidentiality and privacy of all information obtained during the interview. Depending on the jurisdiction in which you live, please refer to the privacy legislation that pertains to your province or territory.

The Kit provides a recommended script for asking questions but these are only a guide. The interviewer should ask questions and then provide choices of pictures/graphs, etc. for the older adult to communicate their response. The older adult will be asked to point to the picture that represents the answer the questions. The interviewer should also observe the older adult's body language for other cues or reactions to pictures and document this information in the Elder Abuse Assessment Form. (See Section 8) The interviewer may want to schedule the interviews over two or three sessions if the older adult is fatigued.

Supplementary Interview Resources

Pictures:

The Kit provides a variety of pictures that can used to illustrate the five main types of elder abuse (physical, emotional/verbal, financial, sexual and neglect). The visual pictures are divided into sections based on the type of abuse. Specific pictures have been chosen to illustrate key actions, emotions, people, places, and responses related

to abuse. The Kit also incorporates pictures using diverse pictorial images including those that are computer generated, hand drawn, generic charts, written words/letters, symbols and photographs. These forms were used to reflect different communication styles of individuals, for example some people may easily recognize an image that is hand drawn as opposed to a computer picture.

The Kit is to be used to start a discussion of the senior's story and is not inclusive of all images that would possibly relate to elder abuse so there may be images that are not included in the Kit. During your interview the older adult can utilize these pictures by pointing or indicating in some way which picture indicates the words they are unable to speak verbally. A recommendation is to place pictures on a table in front of the older adult's line of vision so he/she can scan the pictures then allow time for the older adult to indicate which picture speaks for them. For example, when trying to ask about the time the situation occurred an interviewer may show the calendar and ask the older adult to point to the day of the week or month in which the abuse occurred. The older adult would then be allowed time to think about their response and then point to the appropriate answer.

The Kit does integrate pictures/images that are regularly identified in elder abuse cases. The number of pictures was also limited to lessen confusion for the older adult. If an older adult cannot find the image that they are trying to communicate, the interviewer is encouraged to seek other resources to locate a visual cue(s) to help the older adult communicate.

If one or more forms of abuse are disclosed, the interviewer should refer to the particular sections of the Kit to obtain the appropriate pictures. The interviewer may have to refer back and forth to various pictures in each section of the Kit as the story unfolds during the interview.

Some of the pictures in this Tool kit were accessed on-line through the World Wide Web and none of them had known copyright. Other pictures were produced by a graphic artist or by a photographer in which permission was given to their use in this Tool Kit.

Video:

A video is included in this Kit to illustrate how to use the Elder Abuse Assessment Tool Kit. The video provides information about why the Kit was developed and how to use it. It demonstrates an interview with an older adult who is non-communicative to determine facts and details about a `fictional` elder abuse situation. The video demonstrates an older adult telling her story using images of both letters and visual pictures. The video is 7 minutes in length.

Doll:

Interviewers can also supplement this Kit by integrating the use of a small doll which can be used by the older adult and/or interviewer to show how or where on the body the older adult was harmed. For example, if during the screening process the interviewer suspects the older adult`s arm was pulled or twisted by the abuser, he/she can imitate the action by using the doll. The interviewer may say “do you mean they pulled your arm like this?” (pulling the arm of the doll). The older adult can then verify their response to the question.

If the older adult is having difficultly describing what happened to them through the pictures and symbols the interviewer may say “Would you like to use this doll to show me where he/she hurt you and how?” The interviewer would then give the doll to the older adult to demonstrate the action that took place. The interviewer would then reiterate their interpretation of what the older adult demonstrated with the doll with a statement such as “are you telling me he/she took your arm and twisted it?” The older adult can then use the symbols in the Kit to indicate ‘yes’ or ‘no’.

Prior to using a doll, the interviewer should always confirm with the older adult if he/she would be comfortable using a doll during the interview process, describe how it would be used and the benefits of a doll in accessing information about the situation.

Using Yes and No Questions:

It can be very helpful to use “yes” and “no” questions to obtain information from the older adult about their story. There may be times the interviewer will have to ask several types of questions to enable the older adult to give the correct information. Often questions can be answered with Yes or No responses. For example: "Do you want to talk to me about something that happened? Do you want to go to a private location to talk?, Would you like something to drink?"

The interviewer should be cautious not to use leading questions that specifically describe the “who, what, where and when” facts of the story. Allow the older adult to provide the details through their own direction of pictures, symbols or written words. It can be easy to say “It was the nurse who hit you on the arm at bath time? Instead of asking “Can you tell me who hurt you?, When did this happen?, Do you know approximately what time of day?” If the older adult is trying to communicate information to the interviewer and there is no picture or symbol in the Tool Kit that represents the word he/she is trying to communicate, suggest to the older adult that he/she give you a clue or another similar word. Let them know that you will try to interpret what he/she is trying to tell you.

Self Care

It is important to understand that talking about abuse issues may have an impact on the interviewer's own emotional health and well-being. Many people have either known someone affected by abuse or have experienced it themselves. In undertaking the interview process, the interviewer is encouraged to seek the assistance of another professional, manager, colleague or friend if he/she finds they are having difficulty in responding to the situation or have personal issues arise as a result of the discussion.

Many agencies and organizations have Employee Assistance Programs that offer counselling and support for staff. Agencies are encouraged to integrate a section on the prevention, intervention and response to elder abuse within policies/procedures. These policies should outline response and reporting responsibilities. Policies should also outline the supports available to staff after the situation has been disclosed as well as the supports and resources available for older adults.

WHAT IS ELDER ABUSE?

Elder Abuse is most often defined as: “a single or repeated acts, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within a relationship where there is an expectation of trust, which causes harm or distress to an older person.” (World Health Organization, 2002)

Elder Abuse encompasses many actions and can be divided into 6 subcategories.

- *Physical*
- *Financial*
- *Emotional*
- *Verbal*
- *Sexual*
- *Neglect*

Below, further descriptors are listed to better illustrate the types of abuse that can occur and possible indicators. *Note*: indicators are not always caused by abuse, however each indicator needs to be treated as serious and follow up should occur.

PHYSICAL ABUSE

(a) The use of physical force that causes pain, discomfort or injury or that is excessive for or inappropriate in, the circumstances, or (b) administering or withholding medication for inappropriate purposes.

Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Rough handling, shaking
- Pushing, pulling
- Slapping, hitting
- Kicking, pinching, beating, twisting
- Overmedicating, withholding necessary medications
- Inappropriate restraint use

Possible Indicators:

- o Unexplained injuries
- o Unexplained bruising
- o Unexplained “accidents”
- o Unkempt and signs of under/ over medicated
- o Burn marks

Physical Abuse – Criminal Code Offences

- Assault (Sec 265 C.C.)
- Assault with a Weapon or Causing Bodily Harm (Sec. 267 C.C.)
- Aggravated Assault (Sec. 268 C.C.)
- Sexual Assault With a Weapon, Threats to a Third Party or Causing Bodily Harm (Sec. 272 C.C.)
- Aggravated Sexual Assault (Sec. 273 C.C.)
- Forcible Confinement (Sec. 279 C.C.)
- Murder (Sec. 229 C.C.)
- Manslaughter (Sec 234 C.C.)

FINANCIAL ABUSE

Any theft or misuse of money or property like household goods, clothes or jewelry. It can also include withholding funds and/or fraud. *Note*: the most commonly disclosed form of elder abuse is financial abuse.

Examples include, but are not limited to:

- o Theft of money or belongings
- o Forcing a person to sell possessions
- o Wrongful use of power of attorney
- o Forcing someone to change his/her will
- o Fraud

Possible Indicators:

- o Unexplained or inability to pay bills
- o Refusal to spend money without “permission”
- o Unexplained disappearance of personal belongings
- o Changed Power of Attorney or Will
- o Not spending money
- o Large withdrawal from bank account

Financial Abuse – Criminal Code Offences

- Theft (Sec. 322 C.C.)
- Theft by Holding Power of Attorney (Sec. 331 C.C.)
- Stopping Mail with Intent (Sec. 345 C.C.)
- Extortion (Sec. 346 C.C.)
- Forgery (Sec. 366 C.C.)
- Fraud (Sec. 380 C.C.)

EMOTIONAL ABUSE

Any action or behaviour that may diminish a senior's sense of well-being, dignity or self-worth.

Examples include, but are not limited to:

- o Failure to treat a senior as an adult
- o Making decisions for a senior unnecessarily
- o Talking in a tone that suggests the senior is a child
- o Talking about the senior that suggests he or she is not part of the conversation
- o Threatening, insulting, intimidating or humiliating gestures, behaviour or remark
- o Imposed social isolation including shunning or ignoring or lack of acknowledgement

Possible Indicators:

- o Depression
- o Tearfulness
- o Exclusion from family gatherings
- o No visitors/ outings
- o Low self-esteem
- o Withdrawn
- o Psychosomatic complaints

Psychological (Emotional) Abuse – Criminal Code Offences

- Intimidation (Sec 423 C.C.)
- Uttering Threats (Sec 264.1 C.C.)
- Harassing Telephone Calls (Sec. 372.3 C.C.)

VERBAL ABUSE

Any form of verbal communication of a belittling or degrading nature which may diminish the senior's sense of well-being, dignity or self-worth.

Examples include but are not limited to:

- Shouting
- Inappropriate tone of voice or manner of speaking which is upsetting or frightening
- Any form of verbal communication of a belittling or degrading nature which may diminish the senior's sense of well-being, dignity or self-worth.
- Sarcasm, mocking

Possible Indicators:

- Witnessed or overheard confrontational or inappropriate language and tone of voice
- Depression
- Tearfulness
- Fearfulness
- Exclusion from family gatherings, no visitors/ outings
- Low self-esteem
- Withdrawn
- Psychosomatic complaints

SEXUAL ABUSE

Any non-consensual touching, behaviour or remarks of a sexual nature or sexual exploitation directed towards an older adult by any other person.

Examples include but are not limited to:

- Sexual touching or fondling
- Sexual assault
- Inappropriate sexual language or joking of a sexual nature that is demeaning
- Seductive language or acts
- Suggestive comments
- Humiliating comments or behaviour of a sexual nature

Possible Indicators:

- o Genital infections
- o Frequent urinary tract infections
- o Pain, bruising, bleeding in genital area

Sexual Abuse – Criminal Code Offences

- Sexual Assault with a weapon, threats to a third party or causing bodily harm (Sec. 272 C.C.)
- Aggravated Sexual Assault (Sec. 273 C.C.)

NEGLECT

The failure to provide a senior with the care and assistance required for health, safety or well-being, and includes inaction or a pattern of inaction that jeopardizes the health or safety of that person.

Examples include but are not limited to:

- o Failure to provide medical attention
- o Failure to listen and respond to expressed needs or concerns
- o Failure to provide proper nourishment and fluids
- o Failure to change incontinent residents or respond to calls for assistance
- o Failure to facilitate participation in activities and programs and other forms of socialization

Possible Indicators

- o Failure to thrive
- o Malnourished, Dehydrated
- o Poor Living Conditions
- o Odor
- o Incontinence Products Not Changed
- o Under/ over medicated

Active Neglect – Criminal Code Offences

- Criminal negligence causing bodily harm or death (Sec. 220, 21 C.C.)
- Breach of Duty to provide necessities (Sec. 215 C.C.)

SELF NEGLECT

A senior neglect may also be experiencing ***self-neglect***, meaning the senior is living in an unsafe or unhealthy manner by choice or ignorance.

While this may be distressing to see, it must be remembered that a competent person, of any age, has the right to make choices about their lifestyle and to live at risk if he/she is not a danger to others. However, if you have any concerns about a senior not having the means and supports to access basic necessities or if you feel a senior does not understand the implications and risks of his/her lifestyle, it is suggested that you contact appropriate services.

Recommended Interview Questions

1. Hello __(name)___ I understand that due to your condition/ disease/ etc. you are limited with your verbal speech. Some people who have difficulty speaking or are completely unable to use verbal communication use pictures and other symbols to communicate their story. This Kit has many pictures and symbols that reflect elder abuse and they will help you tell me your story about what happened to you.

2. Using the pictures and symbols in front of you, can you show me how you indicate yes? (i.e. thumb up)

3. Using the pictures and symbols in front of you, can you show me how you indicate no? (i.e. thumb down)

   Now that the interviewer has established symbols for yes and no responses, he/she can proceed with further questions with the older adult. It may also be helpful to inquire if the older adult also reads and writes as they may be able to tell you information using these communication techniques during the interview.

4. Would you be willing to use the picture boards I have with me to tell me your story?

5. Can you read words?

6. Can you write words?

   The interviewer can indicate to the older adult that if the symbol or picture is not in the Kit then they could use a doll (if available) to show what happened.

Assessing Capacity

It is recommended that the interviewer attempt to get some baseline questions documented to give an indication of capacity before the interview. The following are some recommended questions (based on the Mini Mental State Tool). It is not necessary to use them all but they will help to establish orientation of their capacity.

1. What is the year?
2. What is the season?
3. What is the month?
4. What is the date?
5. What is the day?

Memory – Ask the older adult to identify 3 items (perhaps point to 3 items) and after a few minutes ask them to identify the items (or point).

There are a variety of tools used to establish base cognitive status and capacity. These questions do not serve as a legal capacity assessment; they are just an opportunity to establish a baseline of their understanding for future questions.

Sample Assessment Questions

This script is to serve as a starting point in using this Tool Kit. Use the pictures and symbols in Sections 1-7 to guide the senior in responding to your questions. It is important to document the responses to the questions asked on the Elder Abuse Assessment Form (See section 8). Many of the questions are yes and no responses. In other questions that are more descriptive indicate the responses on the Form.

Step 1: Beginning the Conversation

1. Is there something you would like to talk to me about?
2. Are you comfortable speaking to me?
3. Did something happen to you?
4. Could you tell me what happened?
5. Are you safe?
6. Are you in danger?
7. How are you feeling?
8. Are you happy?
9. Do you ever feel mistreated or taken advantage of?
10. Can you read?
11. Are you comfortable using diagrams? Looking at the picture board in front of you (Sections 1-7) do any of the pictures indicate what you would like to talk about with me?

Point to each picture and say the associated word (i.e. "you pointed to 'money', would you like to talk about money?) Verifying the picture(s) should enable you to itemize the type of abuse they wish to discuss further.

Once you have determined the type of abuse, clear away the unneeded picture cards to prevent clutter and confusion. Proceed to asking the following guided questions to obtain more specific information about the occurrence. Remember, a doll (if available) can also be used to illustrate how and where the senior was abused.

Refer the questions that pertain to the type of abuse identified by the older adult from the previous questions. This list of questions for each type of abuse is only a beginning point of discussion. The interviewer will ask other questions based on the responses and information disclosed from the older adult throughout the interview.

Financial Abuse:

1. Do you have any concerns about your money?
    a. Belongings?
    b. Property?
    c. Valuables?
    d. Possessions missing _____ ?

2. Has anyone ever asked you to sign papers that you did not understand?

3. Did you want to sign these documents?

4. Does anyone ever take things from you or use your money without your permission?

5. Do you manage your own money?

6. Did anyone take anything from your purse?

7. Did anyone take anything from your wallet?

8. Did anyone take anything from your bank account?

9. Were you pressured to change your Power of Attorney?

10. Were you pressured to change your Will?

Emotional / Verbal Abuse:

Emotional and Verbal abuse are grouped together as the line of questioning is very similar for each type.

1. Has anyone ever talked to you or yelled at you in a way that made you uncomfortable?
2. Does anyone talk to you like a child?
3. Does anyone ever threaten you?
4. Has anyone ever scolded you?
5. Has anyone ever failed to help you take care of yourself when you needed help?
6. Does anyone ever call you names?
7. Does someone restrict your visitors?
8. Do they keep friends or family members away from you?
9. Do you have access to a phone?
10. Do you have access to attend church/faith group meetings?

Neglect:

1. Are you getting all the help that you need?
2. Are you getting to your doctor's office regularly, when you need to go?
3. Are you alone a lot? (i.e. Do you want to be alone? Are you happy not being with other people around you?)
4. Do you feel that you have food available when you need it?
5. Do you feel your medications are available when you need it?
6. Do you have access to a telephone?
7. When was the last time you got to see relatives and/or friends?
8. Do you have the glasses/dentures/cane that you need?

Physical Abuse:

1. Have you been hurt by someone?
2. Using the pictures and/or the doll, could you show me what was done?
3. What part of your body was hurt?
4. How did the person hurt you? (i.e. choked, slapped, kicked, pinched, grabbed)

Sexual Abuse:

1. Does anyone touch you without your consent?
2. Does anyone touch you sexually without your consent?
3. Does someone make you touch him/her in a sexual way without your consent?
4. Does someone force you into having sex without consent?

Step 2: Inquiring about the Abuser

After the interviewer has asked the above screening questions and has determined that there is a clear allegation of abuse, the next step is to inquire about the alleged abuser and the circumstances of the abuse.

1. Do you know who did this (committed this abuse)?
    - Was it a family member?
    - Was it a friend?
    - Was it someone who works for you?
    - Was it someone who works in this home?
2. Was it a man?
3. Was it a woman?
4. What did he/she look like? (Utilize the colour table available in Section 1 to ascertain hair and eye colour).
5. Do you know the date when this abuse took place?

6. Do you know what time of day this happened? (i.e. night, afternoon, morning)
7. Can you tell me their relationship to you? Ask (family member, caregiver, stranger, worker, other)
8. Can you write down their name?

At this point in time you have been able to determine if an incident of abuse occurred, the general circumstances of the situation and who might be involved.

Step 3: Reporting and/or Referral

If at any point in time during the assessment you identify any risk of imminent harm to anyone or it becomes clear that a crime has occurred or you suspect criminal activity consult your local police service immediately.

Depending on the information obtained at this time, the interviewer may wish to involve police or other investigators to further determine what occurred. Interviewers must follow the legislation pertaining to their province or territory when determining whether to report the alleged abuse to police, adult protective agencies, or other authorities. The older adult's autonomy should be respected and when at all possible be involved in all decision making.

The documented information obtained during the interview can be used by the authorities as it serves as a basis point to begin a further investigation into the alleged abuse. The investigation may proceed to accessing records such as a staff schedule to verify who was working at the time the abuse occurred. They may also interview other staff/family or neighbours to seek additional facts or obtain financial records if needed.

Based on the interviewer's experience in using the Tool Kit, he/she may offer their assistance to the investigator to ask additional questions of the older adult (assuming the investigator is not aware of how to use the Tool).

Step 4: Safety Planning

The interviewer's goal is to ensure the older adult's safety. A safety plan should be developed with the older adult. The interviewer must assess the level of risk in order to enact the most meaningful plan.

In cases where the older adult is capable and chooses to maintain abusive relationships, the options for intervention and safety planning need to be strategic and

meaningful. Paramount in these situations is the preservation of the rights and choices of the older adult. However, this needs to be balanced with the level of risk. In the situation of imminent danger, a police intervention is necessary to preserve the personal safety of the older adult.

Communication Tips with Older Adults When Utilizing the Tool Kit

Getting Started:

- Ask the person to show you how he/she communicates yes.
- Ask the person to show you how he/she communicates no.
- Ask the person if he/she can read?
- Ask the person if he/she can write? (if, he/she can write, the tool might not be completely necessary but could still be helpful).
- Verify your understanding of their limited or non-existent verbal skills. For example: “I understand that you are unable to speak verbally, I wonder if it would be ok for you to use some pictures and symbols to communicate with me?”
- As the person points to a picture/symbol say each word out loud so that the person knows you have the correct word.
- Verify that the person’s message was understood correctly. For example, “you are cold, is that correct?” Verify response of “yes” or “no” with the symbols in the Kit.

Cues:

- Sit facing the person with whom you are communicating.
- Make eye contact.
- Communicate in a private location free of distractions.
- Speak directly to the person, not to the person who may be accompanying them.
- Use everyday language common to the person and their cultural background.
- Do not speak loudly, slowly or in a condescending manner.
- Give the person time to communicate. Do not rush them or try to speak for them to hurry things along.
- Do not feel you have to keep talking. Silence is okay.
- Do not interrupt when the person is trying to communicate.
- Single words are easier to communicate than whole sentences.