

Respecting Seniors Network Disclosure Guideline

The purpose of this guideline

This guideline has been developed to support the Respecting Seniors Network to respond to disclosures of elder abuse, whilst undertaking Respecting Seniors Network activity, as identified in the network's workplan.

What is disclosure?

Within the context of elder abuse, disclosure is when someone reveals they have directly experienced or perpetrated elder abuse. The abuse may be ongoing, have happened recently or occurred in the past. Sometimes the disclosure is about abuse experienced by a close family member or friend, rather than someone disclosing that they have experienced the abuse directly.

How do I recognise a disclosure?

It is important that when undertaking prevention initiatives, a volunteer or staff member of a network organisation is able to identify and respond in an appropriate and effective manner. Disclosures are not always expressed in ways you would expect. Some people do not name their experiences as 'elder abuse' or 'family violence', and disclosures can occur when and where you least expect them. Some people will disclose as part of a group conversation. Others may seek you out for a one-to-one discussion.

What is my role?

There is no expectation for you to become a counsellor or provide ongoing support. The most important thing you can do is listen without judgement and show that you believe what you have been told.

Every instance of elder abuse and its disclosure will be different and there is no one way to respond. However, there are some key things to remember to ensure the person feels supported and able to access any help and support they need. The table below outlines basic expectations of your role in the Respecting Seniors Network when responding to a disclosure of elder abuse.

You should	You should not
Be supportive	Provide advice
Be non-judgemental	Try to fix the situation
Allow the person to make decisions	Provide counselling
Have accurate referral information on hand	Force the person to tell you anything or provide more information

If managing disclosures causes you distress in any way, you are encouraged to access support via your organisations Employee Assistance Program. Network members who

do not represent an organisation are eligible to access Peninsula Health's Employee Assistance Program as a volunteer. Call 1300 687 327 to make an appointment. Alternatively, 1800RESPECT (1800 737 732) provides free phone and online counselling.

How do I respond?

At each network event, there will be an appropriately skilled and qualified network member nominated to respond to any disclosures of elder abuse. The nomination of this person will be made as part of the event planning process and known to all network members involved with running the event.

If a disclosure or query about support is made to a network member at an event, the network member must introduce the person making the disclosure or query to the person nominated to respond.

Guidelines for the person nominated for responding to disclosures

Follow your individual organisation's policies or procedures (if you have them), including reporting the incident to your manager or supervisor.

If you, your manager or supervisor are unsure what to do, secondary consultations are available from Seniors Rights Victoria, 10am – 5pm call 1300 368 821. You can support the older person to make a call or call yourself. This can be anonymous.

Useful tips for managing a disclosure from a victim/survivor

If a victim/survivor discloses to you:

- Believe the older person.
- Respond with kindness.
- Acknowledge what the person has told you and that this must be difficult for them.
- Let the older person know (even if they deny abuse has happened) that it's not their fault, they are not alone (family violence can happen to anyone), and that there is help available.
- Provide a private space to talk.
- Listen without judgement.
- Condemn the use of violence, but not the perpetrator.
- Ask if they are safe right now. Call triple zero (000) if they respond "no".
- Be open and honest, including about your skills, knowledge and capacity to provide support – and state that you can provide referral information about where to get more specialised support or assistance.
- Provide options for the person to seek specialist support if required. It is up to the person making the disclosure to decide whether they want to act.
- Provide accurate referral information.

- Empower the older person to take control of their life and in control of decisions.

Useful tips for managing a disclosure from a perpetrator

While it is less likely, it is possible that someone who has perpetrated elder abuse may disclose their behaviour to you. If this does occur:

- Acknowledge what the person has told you and that this must be difficult for them.
- Provide a private space to talk.
- Listen without judgement.
- Don't confront the perpetrator.
- Condemn the use of violence, but not the perpetrator.
- Don't minimise or justify the use of violence.
- Be open and honest, including about your skills, knowledge and capacity to provide support – and state that you can provide referral information about where to get more specialised support or assistance.
- Provide options for the person to seek specialist support if required. It is up to the person making the disclosure to decide whether they want to act. Provide accurate referral information.

What do I say?

Whilst you can't script every conversation, it can be useful to have some key phrases to assist you to talk with the person making the disclosure.

Talking with a perpetrator making a disclosure

- *Talking to me is an important first step; the next step is to talk to someone who has special training to help you. I can give you contact details...I am concerned for the safety of the people around you and I feel like you are too. I would like you to contact...*

Talking with a victim/survivor making a disclosure

- *I'm glad that you trusted me enough to talk to me about this*
- *That sounds like a terrible experience...*
- *I imagine it has taken a lot of courage for you to share your story with me...*
- *No one should have to experience what you have been through....*
- *What you have just described to me is family violence and that is against the law.*
- *Are you feeling safe at the moment?*
- *I would like to make sure you know where you can get support from trained people; can I provide you with contact details for (consult list of referral contacts).*

References

Our Watch, 2017, *Workplace Equality and Respect Practice Guide – Responding to Disclosures*

Respect Victoria Fact Sheet *What is Elder Abuse*

SMPCP EAPN 2019, *Guidelines for Managing Disclosures of Family Violence and Elder Abuse*

What services can I make a referral to?

Elder Abuse

For support and advice regarding elder abuse please contact:

The Orange Door

P: [1800 319 353](tel:1800319353)

Seniors Rights Victoria

P: [1300 368 821](tel:1300368821) W: <https://seniorsrights.org.au>

Elder Rights Advocacy

For information and advocacy about any aged care concerns

P: [1800 700 600](tel:1800700600) W: <http://era.asn.au>

General Support Services

For general support services available for older people please contact:

My Aged Care

P: [1800 200 422](tel:1800200422) W: www.myagedcare.gov.au

Elder Abuse Support Service

Please contact:

Better Place Australia

P: [1800 639 523](tel:1800639523) W: <https://www.betterplaceaustralia.com.au/counselling-and-psychology/elder-abuse-support-service/>

Legal Advice

For legal advice please contact:

Seniors Rights Victoria

P: [1300 368 821](tel:1300368821) W: <https://seniorsrights.org.au/>

Peninsula Community Legal Centre

P: [03 9783 3600](tel:0397833600) W: <http://pclc.org.au>

Victoria Legal Aid

P: [1300 792 387](tel:1300792387) W: <https://www.legalaid.vic.gov.au>

Office of the Public Advocate

for information or assistance regarding Enduring Power of Attorney, Guardianship or Administration matters

P: 1300 309 337 W: <https://www.publicadvocate.vic.gov.au>

Family Violence specific services

For support relating to family violence please contact:

1800 RESPECT

P: 1800 737 732 (24 hours a day, 7 days a week).

W: <https://www.1800respect.org.au>

Safe Steps Family Violence Response Centre

P: 1800 015 188 or 9322 3555 (24 hours for women and children).

W: <https://www.safesteps.org.au>

Victims of Crime Victoria

Support available for men and women

P: 1800 819 817 W: <https://www.victimsofcrime.vic.gov.au>

Sexual Assault

For crisis support in relation to sexual assault:

Sexual Assault Crisis Line

24 hours

P: 1800 806 292 W: <https://www.secasa.com.au>

Emergency Accommodation

If you need to seek emergency accommodation due to family violence please contact:

Safe Steps Family Violence Response Centre

P: 1800 015 188 or 9322 3555 W: <https://www.safesteps.org.au/>

Salvocare – Peninsula

P: 9784 5000 W: <https://www.salvationarmy.org.au/>

Or Consider Emergency Residential Respite for eligible older people.