

Protection and Advocacy

3 Defining and Identifying Abuse



Introduction

These slides contain content adapted from the Administration for Community Living's Person Centered Counseling Training Program. The content includes text and narration from online courses. To view original content or for more information, please visit nwd.acl.gov or contact NoWrongDoor@acl.hhs.gov.

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Welcome! (1/2)

Maltreatment refers to abuse, neglect, and exploitation. It is important to understand and identify different forms of abuse or maltreatment in your work as a Person-Centered Counseling (PCC) professional in the No Wrong Door (NWD) system. Any person can experience abuse, regardless of age, disability, race, or sex. Any person can inflict abuse on an individual, including friends, family, paid providers, neighbors, and health or homecare professionals.

This lesson provides information on various kinds of abuse while Lesson 4 will focus on neglect and exploitation. Refer to Lesson 5: Reporting Abuse and other Legal Requirements for Mandated Reporters, for more information on next steps if you suspect abuse, neglect, or exploitation.

Welcome! (2/2)

Learning Objective

After completing this lesson: You will be able to define abuse, provide at least three examples for each type of abuse, including physical, emotional and verbal, sexual abuse, and intimate partner violence. You will also be able to identify at least two signs of abuse and two risk factors and protective factors for abuse.

What is Abuse? (1/5)

Abuse is a form of maltreatment. In many instances, it is against the law. It is different from neglect or exploitation, which you will learn more about in Lesson 4 of this course. Each state will have a unique definition for abuse, so make sure you are familiar with your state and local definitions of abuse.

What is Abuse? (2/5)

People seeking services through the No Wrong Door (NWD) system entry point may be children, people with disabilities, veterans, or older adults, among others. They might rely on others for help, such as parents, siblings, children, friends, neighbors, or paid providers. Because of their reliance and dependence on others, they may be taken advantage of by the people supporting them.

Also, people who are abused may have difficulty fighting back, seeking help, or getting away from an abusive situation. The person being abused might also want to protect the abuser (especially if the abuser is family), but this does not mean people seeking services through the NWD system are helpless and need rescuing.

What is Abuse? (3/5)

On the contrary, many live full and independent lives and are capable of seeking help when needed. It's the job of the Person-Centered Counseling (PCC) professional to support and help a person if an abusive situation is disclosed. This support and help might be in the form of further reporting and reaching out to a Protection and Advocacy agency. You will learn more about reporting and other legal requirements in Lesson 5 of this course.

What is Abuse? (4/5)

Again, definitions of abuse will vary by state, but in general, abusive acts have these features in common:

- Abusive acts are intentional. This does not mean they are always viewed as abusive by the abuser.
- Abusive acts are a misuse of power on the part of the abuser. They are done to control, punish, or harm.
- Abusive acts cause, or are likely to cause, physical or emotional distress or psychological harm to the person.

What is Abuse? (5/5)

There are many types of abuse and this lesson will focus on the following types:

- Physical abuse
- Emotional and verbal abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Intimate partner violence (also known as domestic violence)

These are just some of the major types of abuse. There are other, more specific types of abuse as well, such as elder abuse.

Physical Abuse (1/3)

According to the National Adult Protective Services Association, physical abuse:

“...may include slapping, hitting, beating, bruising or causing someone physical pain, injury or suffering. This also could include confining an adult against his/her will, such as locking someone in a room or tying him or her to furniture.”

[source: National Adult Protective Services Association. (n.d.). What Is Abuse? Retrieved from <http://www.napsa-now.org/get-informed/what-is-abuse/>]

Physical Abuse (2/3)

Physical abuse can cause major injuries, but it also might leave no visible mark or injury. The person being abused typically feels frightened and humiliated. They may also have physical and other forms of pain. A single incident of these acts may be reportable. Adult protective laws usually prohibit the use of physical punishment of adults by any family member or caregiver. Physical abuse may also be reportable as a crime, such as assault.

Physical Abuse (3/3)

The following are examples of physical abuse:

- Throwing, biting, scratching, pulling, pushing, or grabbing someone
- Hurting the person
- Restraining the person in a way that results in physical harm
- Using a weapon to hurt a person
- Using excessive force

Please remember these are just general examples and definitions – they will vary by state, county, and agency.

Emotional and Verbal Abuse (1/4)

According to the National Adult Protective Services Association, emotional abuse:

“...involves creating emotional pain, distress, or anguish through the use of threats, intimidation or humiliation. This includes insults, yelling, or threats of harm and/or isolation, or non-verbal actions such as throwing objects or glaring to project fear and/or intimidation.”

[source: National Adult Protective Services Association. (n.d.). What Is Abuse? Retrieved from <http://www.napsa-now.org/get-informed/what-is-abuse/>]

Emotional and Verbal Abuse (2/4)

Emotional abuse is any intentional act that degrades a person's sense of value and hurts a person's self-esteem. Verbal abuse is emotional abuse by using a tone of voice or certain words that harass or frighten a person as a means of control or punishment.

As a Person-Centered Counseling (PCC) professional, keep in mind that family and cultural dynamics are unique. You may encounter some families or cultures that communicate and interact in ways that may seem abusive, such as using swear words, certain tones, or seemingly degrading terms of 'affection' (for example, calling a friend 'dog'), but it might just be the family's own way of communicating or a cultural difference.

Emotional and Verbal Abuse (3/4)

Emotional and verbal abuse can include the following:

- Threats
- Name calling
- Silent treatment
- Harassment
- Criticizing
- Complaining

Emotional and Verbal Abuse (4/4)

- Playing 'mind games'
- Constantly discouraging a person or devaluing his or her hopes Ignoring a person, for example acting as if they exist or only responding to some things
- Humiliating a person
- Refusing to admit their actions in front of others, for example, making it seem that the person receiving care is lying, misinterpreting, or exaggerating behavior

Please remember these are just general examples and definitions – they will vary by state, county, and agency.

Sexual Abuse (1/3)

According to the National Adult Protective Services Association, sexual abuse:

“...includes physical force, threats or coercion to facilitate nonconsensual touching, fondling, intercourse, or other sexual activities. This is particularly true with vulnerable adults who are unable to give consent or comprehend the nature of these actions.”

[source: National Adult Protective Services Association. (n.d.). What Is Abuse? Retrieved from <http://www.napsa-now.org/get-informed/what-is-abuse/>]

Sexual Abuse (2/3)

The key thing to remember with sexual abuse is that it is any nonconsensual contact that is sexual in nature. Just because a person didn't say "no" or "stop" does not mean they consented to sexual activity. The following are some examples of sexual abuse:

- Rape or forced intercourse or anal/oral sex
- Being forced to strip naked
- Being forced to view a person's body, specifically genitals, breasts or buttocks
- Being forced to view pornography
- Molestation, or unwanted touching, petting, or kissing

Sexual Abuse (3/3)

- Denying a person access to sexual information or education, for example, information about birth control or pregnancy
- Forcing ideas about sex, abortion, or sterilization on a person
- Making sexually suggestive comments or looks
- Talking about sex in ways that you know makes a person uncomfortable

Please remember these are just general examples and definitions – they will vary by state, county, and agency. To learn more about sexual violence and abuse, go to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

<http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/sexualviolence/definitions.html>

Intimate Partner Violence (or Domestic Violence) (1/5)

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, intimate partner violence (IPV) is:

“...physical, sexual, or psychological harm by a current or former partner or spouse. This type of violence can occur among heterosexual or same-sex couples and does not require sexual intimacy. It can vary in frequency and severity. It occurs on a continuum, ranging from one hit that may or may not impact the victim to chronic, severe battering.”

[source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (December 17, 2014). Sexual Violence: Definitions. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/sexualviolence/definitions.html>]

Intimate Partner Violence (or Domestic Violence) (2/5)

Intimate partner violence, also known as domestic violence, can look different in each case. Any of these acts may also be combined with other forms of maltreatment and abuse such as physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. People who experience IPV may have complex emotional and personal relationships with their abuser. Many people have a hard time asking for help or realizing they are being abused. Often times, people have feelings of shame, embarrassment, or protectiveness.

Intimate Partner Violence (or Domestic Violence) (3/5)

Also, for people with disabilities who experience IPV, accessible shelters, personal assistance services, or information might not be available. As with all forms of abuse, there is considerable fear and risk in disclosing abuse. Oftentimes, the abuse happens in what is called the cycle of violence, whereby the pattern of violence and abuse follows a cyclical and repeating pattern made up of four stages.

Intimate Partner Violence (or Domestic Violence) (4/5)

Following are some examples of intimate partner violence from the National Domestic Violence Hotline:

- Preventing a person from making their own decisions
- Controlling who a person sees, where a person goes, or what a person does
- Keeping or discouraging a person from seeing friends or family members
- Controlling every penny spent in the household

Please remember these are just general examples and definitions – they will vary by state, county, and agency.

Intimate Partner Violence (or Domestic Violence) (5/5)

The key thing to remember with IPV is that the abuser's actions are often to gain power and control over the person. For more information on IPV, go to the National Domestic Violence Hotline: <http://www.thehotline.org> Learn more about domestic violence and people with disabilities from the organization Barrier Free Living: <http://www.bflnyc.org/about-us/domestic-violence-disability/>

Elder Abuse (1/4)

Elder abuse is another type of abuse, but it can all include any of the types of abuse you just learned about. Elder abuse is any kind of abuse aimed at older adults. This includes physical, verbal, sexual, and intimate partner abuse, as well as neglect and exploitation. Like all kinds of abuse, anyone can be the abuser. Elder abuse can be carried out by a paid home care provider, a family caregiver, a family member, or even a health-care professional.

Elder Abuse (2/4)

Older adults can become at risk for abuse because of their age and increased difficulty with activities such as thinking, remembering, and physical tasks. Also, older adults may be more at risk because of social isolation and other factors, such as chronic health conditions, mental illness, and substance abuse.

Elder Abuse (3/4)

Here are some facts about elder abuse from a publication by the National Adult Protective Services Association, *Elder abuse: Common, lethal, expensive*.

- Elder abuse is common: One in 9 seniors reported being abused, neglected, or exploited in the past 12 months.
- Elder abuse is most often caused by family members or other trusted ones.
- Elder abuse is vastly underreported. For every reported case, 23 cases are unreported according to a 2011 study.
- Elder abuse can lead to illness and death. Abused older adults are 3 times more likely to die.
- Older women and the very old are the most likely to be abused.

Elder Abuse (4/4)

Following are some resources where you can learn more about elder abuse:

- National Committee for the Prevention of Elder Abuse:
<http://www.preventelderabuse.org>
- National Center on Elder Abuse: <http://www.ncea.aoa.gov/faq/index.aspx>

— Signs of Abuse (1/3)

Physical signs of abuse or violence are injuries or marks that appear on a person's body that are new, unusual, or unexplained. People may often have explanations when asked about injuries, but upon closer examination the explanations may not make sense. Sometimes injuries may also appear fairly mild. An example might be small bruises, irritated areas, or scratches. These may not seem very important at first, but an unexplained pattern of these may indicate something more serious.

As a Person-Centered Counseling (PCC) professional you should also be aware of certain behaviors that might be a sign that abuse is happening.

— Signs of Abuse (2/3)

People who have an intellectual or developmental disability or a cognitive impairment, or an older adult with dementia may be unable to communicate about abuse. Also, cultural differences might make it hard to convey experiences. Instead, some people may show signs of abuse through certain behaviors. This can be hard to detect since behavior has many nuances and is not always logical or easy to interpret. Regardless, noticeable changes in behavior may be signs of abuse or other forms of maltreatment, such as neglect or exploitation.

Signs of Abuse (3/3)

Keep in mind that potential signs of abuse might also just be signs of a change in a person's physical or mental health. Each person's situation is different and the context in which a potential sign of abuse is noticed should be considered. For example, if a person is becoming more withdrawn it might be a sign of depression. Although weight loss can be a sign of abuse, it might be expected from a person who is near the end of life. A foul odor from the genital area might be due to the bathing and grooming practices in a different culture and not a sign of sexual abuse. As you can see, some signs of potential abuse might just be due to the natural course of a disease or aging in general. Others might have a cultural explanation. Just remember that context is important to pay attention to.

Risk Factors and Protective Factors for Abuse and Maltreatment (1/3)

There are a variety of factors that can affect a person's risk for abuse or maltreatment. Part of the role of the Person-Centered Counseling (PCC) professional is to be aware of these factors so that the potential for abuse can be recognized and decreased. By learning about what conditions or situations may lead to or decrease the risk for abuse, PCC professionals can:

- Suggest steps to reduce the likelihood of maltreatment occurring
- More easily identify signs of maltreatment when it happens
- Identify and encourage protective factors in the person's community and individual situation

Risk Factors and Protective Factors for Abuse and Maltreatment (2/3)

Certain attitudes, beliefs, and situations within a community, family, or society can make abuse or maltreatment more likely – these are known as risk factors. There are also protective factors that can help to decrease a person’s risk for abuse or maltreatment. Protective factors can be at either the individual level or organizational/ community-based.

Risk Factors and Protective Factors for Abuse and Maltreatment (3/3)

Following are some risk factors that can increase the risk for maltreatment:

- Physical or social isolation
- Lack of support for positive discipline and self-direction
- Negative beliefs and attitudes about people receiving services and supports

Following are some protective factors that can help to decrease a person's risk for maltreatment:

- Empowerment and engagement in the community
- Increased knowledge
- Advocacy and involvement

Identifying Possible Abuse

There may be times in your work as a Person-Centered Counseling (PCC) professional that someone you serve might exhibit signs of possible abuse, neglect, or exploitation. It can be a delicate matter if you suspect maltreatment and don't know how to broach this topic with the person you serve.

Conclusion and Lesson Review (1/2)

- Abusive acts are intentional, meant to harm a person, and a misuse of power by the abuser.
- There are many types of abuse such as physical, emotional and verbal, sexual abuse, and intimate partner violence (also known as domestic violence).
- Definitions of abuse can vary by state, county, and agency. Person-Centered Counseling (PCC) professionals can benefit from understanding and identifying signs of abuse.

Conclusion and Lesson Review (2/2)

Learning Objective

After completing this lesson: You will be able to define abuse, provide at least three examples for each type of abuse, including physical, emotional and verbal, sexual abuse, and intimate partner violence. You will also be able to identify at least two signs of abuse and two risk factors and protective factors for abuse.

Reflection on Learning Objective

Directions: Review the objective(s) on this page. Write down your answers to the following questions.

1. What did you learn in this lesson that you felt was important?
2. What will you do differently because of the content in this lesson?