1. **What is abuse?**

**Abuse is defined in Devon’s and Torbay’s policy and guidance as follows:**

Abuse is a violation of an individual's human and civil rights by another person or persons.

Abuse of a person often includes behaviour that is abusive in one or more of the categories outlined on the following pages. In particular, the majority of people who are experiencing abuse of any kind will also be experiencing psychological abuse.

**Anyone** can be an abuser.

General indicators of an abusive relationship often include the misuse of power by one person over another and are most likely to be found in situations where one person has power over another. For example, where one person is dependent on another for their physical care or due to power relationships in society, (such as, between a professional worker and a service user, a man and a woman or a person of the dominant race/culture and a person of an ethnic minority).

Abuse may consist of a single act or repeated acts. It may be physical, verbal or psychological, it may be an act of neglect or an omission to act or it may occur when a vulnerable person is persuaded to enter into a financial or sexual transaction to which he or she had not consented or cannot consent. Abuse can occur in any relationship and may result in significant harm to - or exploitation of - the person subjected to it.

It is essential to be alert to signals or non-verbal communication or challenging behaviour, and to be aware this could indicate unacceptable practice that is being deliberately hidden or denied.

**There are different forms of abuse, as described on the following pages.**

(Each type of abuse described starts on a fresh page for ease of use.)

1. Psychological abuse
2. Physical abuse
3. Sexual abuse
4. Neglect
5. Discriminatory abuse
6. Financial abuse
7. Institutional abuse
1.1 **Psychological Abuse**

This may include:

- Emotional abuse.
- Threats of harm or abandonment.
- Deprivation of contact.
- Humiliation.
- Blaming.
- Controlling.
- Intimidation.
- Coercion.
- Harassment.
- Verbal abuse/excessive criticism.
- Isolation or withdrawal from services or support networks.

**Note:** *Psychological abuse will usually occur in conjunction with other forms of abuse.*

Signs that psychological abuse may be taking place could include:

- Difficulty gaining access to the adult on their own or the adult gaining opportunities to contact you.
- The adult not getting access to medical care or appointments with other agencies.
- Low self-esteem.
- Lack of confidence and anxiety.
- Increased levels of confusion.
- Increased urinary or faecal incontinence.
- Sleep disturbance.
- The person feeling/acting as if they are being watched all of the time.
- Decreased ability to communicate.
- Communication that sounds like things that the perpetrator would say or language being used that is not usual for the service user.
- Deference/submission to the perpetrator.
1.2 Physical Abuse

Physical abuse may include:

- Hitting.
- Slapping.
- Pushing.
- Kicking.
- Misuse of medication.
- Restraint or inappropriate sanctions.

Signs that physical abuse may be taking place can be:

- Injuries that are consistent with physical abuse.
- Injuries that are the shape of objects.
- Presence of several injuries of a variety of ages.
- Injuries that have not received medical attention.
- A person being taken to many different places to receive medical attention.
- Skin infections.
- Dehydration.
- Unexplained weight changes or medication being lost.
- Behaviour that indicates that the person is afraid of the perpetrator.
- Change of behaviour or avoiding the perpetrator.
1.3 **Sexual Abuse**

Sexual abuse may include:

- Rape and sexual assault to which the vulnerable adult has not consented, could not consent, or was pressurised into consenting.

- Non-contact sexual abuse could include being forced or coerced to be photographed or videoed to allow others to look at their body.

- Any sexual activity involving staff will be regarded as contrary to professional standards and hence abusive.

  **Signs that sexual abuse may be taking place:**

- Sexually transmitted diseases or pregnancy.

- Tears or bruises in genital/anal areas.

- Soreness when sitting.

- Signs that someone is trying to take control of their body image, for example, anorexia, bulimia or self-harm.

- Sexualised behaviour.

  The signs that a person may be experiencing sexual abuse and psychological abuse are often very similar. This is due to the emotional impact of sexual abuse on a person’s sense of identity and to the degree of manipulation that a perpetrator may carry out in “grooming” a victim.
1.4 **Neglect**

Neglect can include:

- Ignoring medical or physical care needs.
- Failure to provide access to appropriate health, social care or educational services.
- The withholding of the necessities of life, such as medication, adequate nutrition and heating.

Signs that neglect may be occurring:

- Malnutrition.
- Rapid or continuous weight loss.
- Not having access to necessary physical aides.
- Inadequate or inappropriate clothing.
- Untreated medical problems e.g. pressure ulcers
- Dirty clothing/bedding.
- Lack of personal care.
1.5 **Discriminatory Abuse**

- Discriminatory abuse may include:
  - Racist slurs.
  - Sexist slurs.
  - Slurs or harassment on the basis of a disability.
  - Slurs or harassment on the basis of sexual preference.
  - Age discrimination is also a form of abuse.

  Signs that discrimination may be taking place include:

  - A person overly concerned about race, sexual preference and the like.
  - A person tries to be more like others.
  - A person reacts angrily if any attention is paid to race, sex and the like.
  - A carer is overly critical/anxious about these areas.
  - Disparaging remarks made.
  - A person is made to dress differently.
1.6 **Financial Abuse**

Financial abuse may include:

- Theft.
- Fraud.
- Exploitation.
- Pressure concerning wills, property, inheritance or financial transactions.
- The misuse or misappropriation of property, possessions or benefits by someone who has been trusted to handle their finances or who has assumed control of their finances by default.

Signs that financial abuse may be occurring include:

- Sudden loss of assets.
- Unusual or inappropriate financial transactions.
- Visitors whose visits always coincide with the day a person's benefits are cashed.
- Insufficient food in the house.
- Bills not being paid.
- A person who is managing the finances being overly concerned with money.
- A sense that the person is being tolerated in the house due to the income they bring in; sometimes with that person not included in the activities the rest of the family enjoys.

If the vulnerable person is asking for someone in authority to take on his or her financial affairs, establish whether this should be someone in the local authority, for example, Home Care or another professional.

Acquire the appropriate forms, either appointee forms from the Department of Work and Pensions or Court of Protection forms from the Public Guardianship office.
1.7 **Institutional abuse**

Institutional abuse may include:

- Times for rising and going to bed are set to suit staff and shift changeovers and do not take account of personal need or preference
- No choice of meal time, or venue in which to eat meals or of menu
- Wearing other people’s clothes
- Set times for drinks that are inflexible
- Set times for being taken to the toilet or having a bath (to suit staff)
- Call bells not answered during staff breaks
- Lack of appropriate equipment, particularly for moving and handling
- Failure to use moving and handling equipment as per care plan
- Communal use of resident’s money e.g. for the home mini bus
- Resident’s challenging behaviour used as an excuse for responding in a particular way

Institutional abuse refers to any care activity that is delivered in a way that suits the needs of the organisation and the staff rather than the needs of the service users. This type of abuse can vary in seriousness from poor practice which needs to be addressed with the provider, through to dangerous and abusive practice which needs to be addressed through the multi-agency adult protection policy.