

What to do if you suspect a vulnerable adult is the victim of abuse

Safeguarding adults in Sussex



Adult abuse is where a person who is unable to protect themselves is ill-treated or neglected. Abuse can be planned or unplanned, it can be a one-off incident or repeated.

A vulnerable adult is someone who is unable to look after themselves because of a disability, a chronic (long-term) illness or their age.

Some vulnerable adults will not be able to tell anyone they are being abused. Changes in someone's physical or emotional state, or injuries which a vulnerable adult cannot explain, may be a sign of abuse.

West Sussex Adults' Services offices

- Durban House, Durban Road, Bognor Regis PO22 9RE. Phone: 01243 642400 Fax: 01243 642437
- 1a East Row, Chichester PO19 1PD Phone: 01243 752999. Fax: 01243 752644
- Whiphill Farmhouse, Lamberts Lane Midhurst GU29 9DZ. Phone: 01243 752999
- Centenary House, County Buildings Woodfield Road, Crawley RH10 8GN. Phone: 01293 895100. Fax: 01293 895114
- Oaklands, Oaklands Road, Haywards Heath RH16 1SU. Phone: 01444 446100 Fax: 01444 446144
- Talbot House, 20-22 East Street, Horsham RH12 1HL. Phone: 01403 213100 Fax: 01403 213125
- 44 High Street, Littlehampton BN17 5ED Phone: 01903 738900. Fax: 01903 738989
- Glebelands, Middle Road, Shoreham-by-Sea BN43 6GA. Phone: 01273 268800 Fax: 01273 268801
- Centenary House, Durrington Lane, Worthing BN13 2QB. Phone: 01903 839100 Fax: 01903 839248

Independent agencies

- Elder Abuse Response 080 8808 8141
- Respond (for people with learning difficulties) 0808 8080 700
- West Sussex Mental Health (24 hour) Helpline 0845 300 2727
- Public Concern at Work (for staff concerned about malpractice in the workplace) 020 7404 6609
- NHS Direct 0845 4647
- Samaritans 0845 790 9090

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www.westsussex.gov.uk
E-mail: safeguardingadults@westsussex.gov.uk
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Agencies in West Sussex who have responsibility for vulnerable adults have worked together to agree how to respond if there is suspicion that a vulnerable adult is being abused.

This leaflet tells you what to do if you think a vulnerable adult is the victim of abuse. It also gives the main points of the Sussex multi-agency policy and procedures for safeguarding vulnerable adults.

There are many forms of abuse.

- **Physical abuse** could be pushing, shaking, pinching or slapping someone, using inappropriate restraint, or withholding care.
- **Sexual abuse** means involving a vulnerable adult in sexual activity when they do not, or are not able to, give their consent, or where the other person is in a position of power or authority.
- **Financial abuse** is where another person uses the vulnerable adult's resources for their own advantage, for example, changing the ownership of a property without the vulnerable adult's permission, or controlling the vulnerable adult's access to their own money or benefits.
- **Neglect** is where a carer fails to meet a vulnerable adult's needs for care, resulting in a risk to their wellbeing. (This failure does not have to be deliberate.)
- **Emotional or psychological abuse** includes shouting at, belittling, ridiculing, or bullying a vulnerable adult, or pressurising them to make decisions.
- **Discriminatory abuse** involves treating a person in a way that does not respect their needs including race, culture and ethnic background, age, sex, religion, disability and sexuality.

We use the term 'safeguarding adults' to mean supporting vulnerable adults who may be being abused to live as independently and safely as possible. Our aim is to give vulnerable adults control of their lives and help them to choose the services to achieve this rather than us simply stepping in to provide protection.

Where does abuse happen?

Abuse can happen anywhere, including:

- at home;
- in day care, residential or nursing-home care;
- in hospital or at a GP surgery;
- at a police station;
- at work or in education; or
- in a public place.

Who abuses?

Anyone could be an abuser, including:

- a partner, child or other relative;
- a friend or neighbour;
- a health, social-care or other worker;
- a volunteer worker;
- a stranger; or
- another vulnerable adult.

What you should do

If you think that a vulnerable adult has been abused or is at risk of abuse, you should:

- ask the police to protect the person or call an ambulance to treat them, if they are in immediate danger;
- contact Adults' Services (see the back page for contact addresses) or one of the independent agencies for advice (if you are a care worker, you should contact your manager); and
- make a note of your concerns, what has happened, and any action you have taken.

What you should not do

Do not:

- start to investigate the situation;
- confront the person you think is responsible for the abuse; or
- destroy any evidence.

What will Adults' Services do?

Adults' Services will find out as much as possible about what has happened by:

- talking to the vulnerable adult;
- talking to those involved with the care of the vulnerable adult;
- talking to the police if it is a criminal matter; and
- talking to health professionals and other agencies.

They will then plan what to do to safeguard the vulnerable adult and support their carers.

Occasionally, the vulnerable adult may refuse the help that is offered and Adults' Services have limited legal powers to take action against their wishes. However, agencies can continue to monitor the situation closely.

Agencies involved

West Sussex County Council Adults' Services; Sussex Police; West Sussex NHS Trusts; West Sussex Primary Care Trust; district councils' housing departments; Commission for Social Care Inspections; West Sussex Forum (independent care homes consortium); carers' groups; Mencap; MIND; and Age Concern West Sussex.

Other formats

If you would like the information in this leaflet in another format, for example, on cassette tape, in Braille, or in another language, please contact us.

