



IT'S YOUR RIGHT
Protecting Yourself Financially As You Age

Topic 7: Financial Abuse, What You Need To Know

What Is Abuse | Who Is Involved | Indicators | Getting/Giving Help



Joan has a grandson that she cares about and wants to see do well in life. Greg has always asked for money occasionally, but now it is starting to become a frequent request. When she says no to Greg he gets angry, sometimes he yells, tells her she is mean, or walks out and slams the door behind him. Joan hates to see Greg upset and feels the only way to avoid this, is by giving him what he has asked for. It is getting to the point where she really feels she has no option but to fulfil Greg's requests - especially since he stole money from her purse the one time she did turn him down. Joan realizes this is becoming a problem but feels too vulnerable and alone to talk to someone.

Like Joan, many seniors find themselves in a situation where they are being taken advantage of for their money or assets. Nobody likes to think of themselves as a victim of any type of abuse or crime, and therefore we often brush it off, minimize it's severity or try to hide that it is happening. In Joan`s case this may sound like:

- "Greg doesn't ask for money very often, it's the least I can do to help him out."
- "He doesn't really get that upset, I know he would never hurt me."
- "He is just going through a tough time; things will get better for him."
- "I give money to all my grandchildren, he is no different."
- "If his parents found out this was happening, they'd likely overreact and cause him trouble."

Financial abuse is one of the most common forms of abuse reported. Financial abuse is the illegal or unauthorized use of someone else`s money or property. It includes pressuring someone for money or property.

Some types of financial abuse are very clear - such as theft or fraud, while others are harder to put a name to. This may include things like pressuring you, or tricking you into giving away your money or possessions.

Financial abuse can happen to anyone and some people do not even realize that they are being financially abused. This can be the case if you have given someone access to your bank accounts or you need assistance with banking. Sometimes it can be very difficult to determine if the situation you are in is actually an abusive one. Listen to you gut! If you don`t feel good about it, chances are it is not right!



Sometimes we can easily see it and name it, while other times we are not quite sure.

Examples of financial abuse:

Theft of money, credit cards, bank cards and/or possessions.

Misuse of your money, such as cashing cheques or accessing accounts without your permission, consent, or awareness.

Use of your money for purposes other than what you intend for that money.

Not allowing you to spend money on what you want.

Threatening or pressuring you to give money or property.

Pressuring you into loaning money with no intent to pay it back.

Failing to provide agreed-upon services to you such as care giving, home or vehicle repair, or financial management.

Pressuring, tricking or threatening you to make changes to your will, power of attorney or other legal arrangements.

Misuse of a power of attorney by doing things that are not in your best interests. For example, taking money from your bank account to pay their own personal bills, or selling or transferring your property against your wishes or without your knowledge.

Having you unfairly shoulder their expenses. For example, someone sharing a home with you but not contributing towards a reasonable amount of expenses.

Source: (Alberta Health)



Rosemary has recently become a widow and has been feeling down and lonely. Her neighbor John has started visiting and offering to help her out. John realizes Rosemary cannot drive so he offers to go buy her groceries. Rosemary gives him her bank card and PIN so that she doesn't need to worry about making arrangements to pay him back. John goes the grocery store to help Rosemary out but also takes out extra money for himself without her permission or her being aware of the situation. He figures it's the least he deserves for going out of his way to help her. And it's not like she will find out.

The person committing the financial abuse (the perpetrator or abuser) can be anyone. They can be a stranger who befriends you, a family member whom you love very much, a close friend, and also professionals or caregivers hired to help.

An abuser is most likely a person who has a close connection to you. Often, they use their connection to take advantage of you and force you to do what they want. Other times, it is a crime of opportunity and desperation. They need money for some reason or another, and feel like they can get away with it. This is not your fault! There may be many reasons behind their actions, and regardless of the reason, financial abuse under any circumstance is not only wrong, it is also a crime!



Family members, including sons, daughters, grandchildren or spouses.

They may:

- Have substance abuse, gambling, or financial problems.
- Believe they should receive inheritance and have no problem taking what they believe is “almost” or “rightfully” theirs.
- Fear that you will get sick and use up your savings, depriving them of an inheritance.
- Have had a negative relationship with you and feel a sense of “entitlement”.
- Have negative feelings towards siblings or other family members whom they want to prevent from acquiring or inheriting your assets.
- Believe you owe them for what they are doing for you in terms of caring for you or running errands for you.
- Have the intent of ‘borrowing’ money but never seem to get around to paying it back because they know you have more than they do.

Predatory individuals who seek out vulnerable seniors, with the intent of exploiting them.

They may:

- Profess to love or care greatly about you.
- Seek employment as personal care attendants, counsellors, etc. to gain access.
- Identify vulnerable persons by driving through neighborhoods (to find persons who are alone and isolated) or contact recently widowed persons they find through newspaper death announcements.
- Move from community to community to avoid being caught (transient criminals).
- Crooked professionals or businesspersons, or persons posing as such. They may:
 - Overcharge for services or products.
 - Use deceptive or unfair business practices.
 - Use their positions of trust to gain compliance.

Source: (National Centre for the Prevention of Elder Abuse)



Financial abuse can be hard to identify. Joan used to feel great about giving her grandson Greg money, but now it is not optional. Is she being pressured and forced to help him out, or is she still giving him money at her own will?

Financial abuse is usually not one single scenario; it is more of a pattern of scenarios that lead to financial abuse. It may be happening to you, and you may not be aware. It may be happening to a friend, and they may not be aware. Or you may be like Joan, who is not quite sure anymore.

Many of us live in small communities, where we are fortunate to have trustworthy friends or family close by. As a caring citizen, you can play an important part in helping that friend or family member remain safe and secure from financial abuse.

There are many ways financial abuse can occur. That`s why it is important to know and watch for common signs that abuse is happening, or could be happening. Trust your gut! If you feel uncomfortable, or sense that someone else does, they may be experiencing financial abuse.



If you fall under one or more of these scenarios you may be at risk for being financially abused.

- I have trouble paying bills because they are confusing to me.
- I don't feel confident making big financial decisions alone.
- I don't understand decisions that someone else is making for me about my money or property.
- I give loans or gifts that are more than I can afford.
- I'm coerced into providing food, shelter, child care or other services to people without being paid or fairly compensated.
- I'm receiving little or no money for the work I do, including child care.
- My children, or others around me, are pressuring me to give them money or property.
- People are contacting me and asking for money.
- Someone is accessing my accounts without my permission.
- Someone is cashing my pension cheque or other cheques without my permission.
- I've felt pressured or forced to make a purchase that I don't want or need.
- I've felt forced into signing a power of attorney, changing my will, or selling my house.
- I've felt pressured to sign legal or financial documents that I don't understand.
- Money seems to be disappearing from my accounts and I don't know where it is going.

Source: Alberta Health (Protecting Against Financial Abuse)



If you see one or more of these following scenarios happening over time, financial abuse may be occurring.

- They seem isolated or withdrawn.
- There's a sudden or unexpected change in living arrangements.
- They show signs of depression or mental illness.
- They're assuming financial responsibility for a family member such as an adult child or spouse.
- They exhibit an unusual fear or sudden change in feelings about a particular person or people.
- They have a change in appearance, such as poor hygiene or sudden weight loss.
- They're frequently accompanied by someone who appears overly protective or controlling.
- They need to "ask permission" from someone before making a purchase, paying a bill or spending money.
- There's a change in their ability to perform daily activities, such as self-care, management of finances or medication.
- There's a noticeable discrepancy between their income and their standard of living.
- They're suddenly unable to pay their bills.
- There are unusual financial transactions such as unexplained bank withdrawals or unusual purchases.
- Hearing comments about an older person that suggest a false sense of entitlement, such as: "it's my inheritance" or "they owe me".

Source: Alberta Health (Protecting Against Financial Abuse)



Pierre's son has been using his authority as Pierre's appointed power of attorney to make financial decisions which are not in line with Pierre's wishes and desires. It started with his son taking extra money out of his savings account, and now has escalated to him cashing in on some of Pierre's life insurance policies, and selling off some of the antique furniture he had stored away to give his other children. Pierre has chosen ignore or "put up" with his sons behaviour because he thought it would go away. He feels responsible for his son's behaviour, after all he did raise him.

If you think financial abuse may be happening to you, or to someone you know, take action right away! As in the case of Pierre, ignoring it will not make it go away. **Asking for help** is always the first step.

A financial abuser may try to make you feel responsible for what is happening. Remember, it is never your fault! Abuse under no circumstance is acceptable. If the financial abuser is a family member it can be very difficult to "call them out" as you may be scared of the consequences. They may stop helping you, caring for you, or end their relationship with you altogether. Although these feelings are understandable, it is important that you **ask for help if you want the abuse to stop!**

We all know someone who is experiencing financial abuse within a family relationship, and refuses to report it. This usually means the abuse continues to happen and gets worse, sometimes even developing into verbal abuse, physical abuse or neglect. It is very important to **use the resources around you that can help.**



Don't blame yourself.

It's not your fault, and it is important that you ask for help. You have the right to be treated respectfully. Turn to a friend, a trusted family member, an organization in your community. Your rights, safety and dignity must always be protected. It's your right!

Call the police.

The police can listen to your story and help determine if you have been a victim of a criminal offence. They may be able to refer you to community resources that can help, such as victim services. (Police contact section included in this toolkit).

Keep a record.

Keep a journal of what is happening to you. This will serve as a record and help other people assist you.

Contact your bank or financial institution.

Talk to your banker and ask to have protective measures put in place. This may look like withdrawal limits on bank accounts, new PIN numbers, removing permissions or authority that the abuser has on your accounts.

Talk to someone you trust.

It is important to reach out to someone you trust to talk about what is happening to you. This doesn't only have to be a friend or family member, it could be your doctor, nurse, clergy person, banker, or counsellor.

Source: Alberta Health (Protecting Against Financial Abuse)



The It's Not Right program from Western Education (Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children), has developed a 3 step approach to how you can identify abuse and help protect those at risk.

- 1. SEE it!**
- 2. NAME it!**
- 3. CHECK it!**

SEE it! If your gut is telling you something is wrong, take your concerns seriously. Learn the warning signs of financial abuse.

"I am worried about my friend who hasn't been to play cards for weeks. The last thing I heard was her adult son had moved into her house with his new girlfriend."

NAME it! Overcome your hesitation to help. Talk to the person you think may be abused. Make sure you are alone with the person when you have this conversation. (It may put you and the other person at risk of further harm if the abusive person is aware that you are trying to make the abuse stop). Let them know you are concerned and offer to help. If the person declines help, don't give up! You can't force them to get help, but you can keep checking in on them and continue to offer your support.

Don't be judgmental. Understand that it is very difficult for people to reach out for help. Remember that you are there to listen and provide support when it is needed.

"I haven't seen you at the card game for some time now, and I know how important it is to you. You seem upset. I miss seeing you. Is there anything you want to talk about?"

CHECK it! Ask questions.

"Are you ok? Do you feel safe? Is there anyone hurting you or making you feel uncomfortable? What do you want to do? How can I help?"

If you are concerned about the person's immediate safety call the police.

For more information on the It's Not Right program visit www.itsnotright.ca - this program comes from the University of Western Ontario but has relevant information for anyone experiencing abuse.