

## Definitions of abuse and their signs and symptoms (adults)

Type of abuse	Signs/symptoms
<p><b>Physical</b> Includes hitting, slapping, pushing, kicking, misuse of medication, restraint, inappropriate sanctions, rough handling, pinching, punching, shaking, burning, forced feeding, the use of force which results in pain, injury or change in individual's natural physical state.</p>	<p>Bruises, lacerations, abrasions, fractures, bites, burns, scalds, hair loss in one area, cowering, flinching.</p>
<p><b>Financial/material abuse</b> Including theft, fraud, exploitation, pressure in connection with wills, property, financial transactions, the misuse or misappropriation of property, possessions or benefits.</p>	<p>Anxiety about money and payments, change in the ability to pay for goods and services, loss of personal possessions of value.</p>
<p><b>Institutional abuse</b> Involves collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to vulnerable people. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour that amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and stereotyping. It includes a failure to ensure the necessary safeguards are in place to protect vulnerable adults and maintain good standards of care in accordance with individual needs, including training of staff, supervision and management, record-keeping and liaising with other providers of care.</p>	<p>Unkempt and dirty, unusually subdued, lack of aids to support daily life, anxiety and fear in the presence of social care workers, drowsiness.</p>
<p><b>Neglect or acts of omission</b> Includes 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, heating and undermining personal beliefs.</p>	<p>Lack of cleanliness – for the person and their environment, lack of aids to support daily life, malnutrition.</p>

<p><b>Psychological abuse</b> Includes emotional abuse, threats of harm or abandonment, deprivation of contact, humiliation, blaming, controlling, intimidation, coercion, harassment, verbal abuse, isolation or withdrawal from services or supportive networks, withholding affection, shouting, depriving the person of the right to choice, information and privacy. Behaviour that has a harmful effect on the vulnerable adult's emotional health and development.</p>	<p>Changes in mood/behaviour/responsiveness/appetite/sleep patterns/continence, use of eye contact.</p>
<p><b>Self-harm</b> The individual inflicts harm upon themselves and includes biting, scratching, picking at existing wounds or sores (which causes non-healing), pulling out hair, substance misuse.</p>	<p>Bruises, lacerations, bites, scratches, hair loss in one area, unusual non-healing of sores, evidence of substance misuse.</p>
<p><b>Sexual abuse</b> Includes rape and sexual assault or sexual acts to which the vulnerable adult has not consented, could not consent or was pressured into consenting. Inappropriate touching and fondling, indecent exposure, penetration (or attempted penetration) of vagina, anus or mouth by penis, fingers or other objects.</p>	<p>Changes in mood and behaviour, attention seeking, withdrawal, uninhibited sexual behaviour and/or language, reluctance to undress, anxiety, evidence of infection or injury in the genital area.</p>

**NOTE:**

**The professional accommodation syndrome  
The rule of optimism**

Social care professionals need to be aware of their own feelings in cases of abuse. It is natural for people to deny, retract or ignore that abuse is taking place, but it is important to be aware that **anyone** could be an abuser.