

# OLDER ADULTS AND BULLYING



## WHAT IS BULLYING?

Bullying is “a social and interpersonal problem that is characterized by intentional, repetitive, aggressive behaviour involving an imbalance of power or strength”. (Hazelden Foundation, 2008)

**Bullying (also known as harassment) happens when a person or a group of people repeatedly hurts, threatens, or scares a peer.**

Awareness and prevention activities have been traditionally aimed at younger generations, but **bullying can occur across the life course**. Little is known about the prevalence of bullying among older adults, research on the topic is scarce, but stories identifying conflicts in groups of older adults (either living together in a facility, or gathering on a regular basis) are numerous.

## IMPACT

### Bullied Older Adults      Witnesses of Bullying

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|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• social/emotional distress,</li><li>• depression,</li><li>• anxiety, sleep difficulties,</li><li>• self-harming behaviours or physical injury,</li><li>• isolation,</li><li>• lower self-esteem, functional changes</li></ul> | <p>May feel guilty for not intervening. This may result in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• a decrease in self-worth,</li><li>• reduced satisfaction with their living environment or social program,</li><li>• a loss of confidence in the ability of the facility/ organization to protect them against bullying, leading to fear and disrespect.</li></ul> |
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## Generally 3 types of older adult bullying can occur:

- Adult to adult
- Older adult to staff
- Staff to older adult

## CAUSES

**People who bully** may be experiencing low self-esteem, a loss of control over one or more parts of their life, and may be struggling to maintain some sense of control or power.

Underlying causes of bullying may be impacted by:

- Loneliness and social isolation
- Compounded losses (loved ones, family home, changes in mobility, community, independence, etc.)
- Changes in mental health and well-being
- Lack of understanding or assumptions about other ways of life and cultures
- General fear and anxiety

**Pink Shirt Day 2022**

**#PinkShirtDayForAll**

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CANADIAN NETWORK for  
the PREVENTION of ELDER ABUSE

## WHAT YOU CAN DO TO PREVENT BULLYING

Creating a supportive environment, where people are comfortable identifying and challenging bullying behaviours, is vital to the overall health and quality of life for older Canadians. Here are some simple things you can do to help prevent bullying:

- **Establish clear guidelines and policies** to address bullying behaviours in your facility/organization;
- **Teach de-escalation strategies** to staff and participants/residents;
- **Put up posters** that promote kindness, civility, and inclusion;
- **Make your common spaces welcoming** and safe for everyone;
- **Increase education and awareness** through presentations, group activities, and discussions;
- **Seek out bystander intervention workshops and assertiveness trainings** to learn how to safely react.

By increasing awareness and providing education, support, and resources to prevent bullying among older adults, we can all help older Canadians live healthier, happier lives.

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## WHERE TO GET HELP

For a full list of supports across Canada, visit [cnpea.ca](https://cnpea.ca) - [Find Help](#)

### IN ONTARIO

#### **Elder Abuse Prevention Ontario**

Provides information and referrals for seniors and agencies, public awareness, education and training.

[www.eapon.ca](https://www.eapon.ca)

☎ 416-916-6728

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#### **Advocacy Centre for the Elderly**

Community based legal clinic for low income senior citizens.

[www.advocacycentreelderly.org](https://www.advocacycentreelderly.org)

☎ 1-855-598-2656

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#### **ConnexOntario Helpline (24 hrs)**

Support for someone experiencing a mental health concern.

[www.connexontario.ca](https://www.connexontario.ca)

☎ 1-866-531-2600

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#### **Ontario Association for Family Mediation**

Helps people work out their own solutions to bullying in a safe and comfortable setting.

[www.oafm.on.ca](https://www.oafm.on.ca)

☎ 1-844-989-3026

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#### **Ontario Provincial Police**

The Community Support Unit can offer help.

[www.opp.ca](https://www.opp.ca)

☎ 1-888-310-1122

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#### **Seniors Support Line (24 hrs)**

Crisis and support line for seniors who have experienced abuse or neglect.

[www.eapon.ca/seniors-safety-line](https://www.eapon.ca/seniors-safety-line)

☎ 1-888-299-1011