

Protecting Vulnerable Adults from Abuse

What you can do about it

Most of us know that children can be abused and that Social Services are there to deal with it. However adults can be and often are abused as well. People can be especially vulnerable if they have a disability which makes them less able to protect themselves. In Bath & North East Somerset all the agencies involved in caring for disabled people work together to respond in a coordinated way to cases of suspected abuse. We aim to ensure that vulnerable adults can be offered help and protection whilst still respecting their rights as adults.

**Abuse of adults is usually a hidden, secretive matter.
Vulnerable adults need other people, members of the public as well as professionals, to get something done about it**

Do Social Services tackle abuse against all adults?

No, Social Services will only become involved if the person is vulnerable because:

- They have a physical or sensory disability or illness
- They are elderly and frail
- They have a learning disability (formerly known as mental handicap)
- They have a mental health problem

What kinds of abuse are we talking about?

Abuse can take many forms, for example,:

- Financial abuse – stealing, fraud and pressurising vulnerable people to part with money, benefits, property or possessions
- Physical abuse – including slapping, pinching, rough handling, over use of medication, denying food or drink,
- Sexual abuse – this can include exposing someone to pornography or being made to watch indecent acts as well as rape or unwanted touching.

- Mental or psychological abuse – threats, insults, intimidation, harassment, stopping someone seeing friends or family, or invading their privacy. Repeatedly making someone feel unhappy or humiliated. Denying someone the right to vote or forcing them to live somewhere they don't want to are forms of abuse.
- Neglect – refusing help when needed, locking someone in a room, poor food, poor care, poor hygiene, denying access to medical care or proper clothing, keeping someone in cold conditions.

These are just a few examples.

Just because there is no physical injury does not mean there is no abuse.

Who abuses?

Anyone can abuse. It can be a stranger or someone well known, a family member, or a health or social care professional or voluntary worker. Sometimes loving carers can abuse because they have become stressed and exhausted. We do our best to help sensitively in these situations.

What if someone is neglecting themselves?

Every adult has the right to choose their own lifestyle, even when it is not in their best interests. However when someone vulnerable neglects themselves to a point where their health and safety is seriously at risk, Health and Social Services will work together to do their best to offer help and support. You can make a referral to the Social Services Community and Health Access Team if you are concerned about someone who is seriously neglecting themselves.

I'm worried about telling Social Services – will they take the person into care?

Adults are not 'taken into care' except in the most exceptional circumstances prescribed by law, for example, under the Mental Health Act 1983. We work at all times to help adults live independently at home, with support if necessary. We also support carers in their caring role.

The person I'm concerned about is in a care home – what do I do?

It makes no difference – you can report it in the same way. Where you feel that the care is unsatisfactory but does not amount to abuse, you may wish to ask to speak to the Manager of the Home first to see if the situation will be remedied. You can also report it to the Commission for Social Care Inspection, the body responsible for inspecting care homes on 01454 454010

What should I do if I think someone may be at risk of abuse?

- You can telephone on 01225 477000 and ask for the Community and Health Access Desk. Or you can visit the Community and Health Access Reception Desk at The Guildhall, High Street, Bath. Hours are normal office hours, 8.30 – 17.00 Monday, Tuesday and Thursday - 9.30 to 17.00 Wednesday and 8.30 to 16.30 on Fridays.
- If possible you should try to get the person's permission to contact us. But if this is not practically possible, you can still report the matter to us.
- People can refer themselves if they wish. If you want, you can have an advocate or a representative speak on your behalf.

What will we do?

We will investigate all cases of suspected abuse with sensitivity, respecting the rights of all those concerned. We can provide help, in partnership with our colleagues in Health and other agencies to protect and support adults who have suffered abuse and neglect.

In an emergency, if someone is in immediate danger, dial 999.

If your concerns are of a possible criminal nature but it is not an emergency, you can contact the Police on 0845 456 7000. Say your concerns are about a vulnerable adult and that you have seen this leaflet.

The person I am concerned about is not disabled. What can I do?

If the person you think is being abused is not disabled, you can encourage them to seek help from the police, or report it to the police yourself. There are specialist police officers trained in domestic violence work. Other useful numbers are:

Bath Women's Aid – 01225 466989

Women's Aid National Domestic Violence Helpline – 08457 023468

Bath Victim Support – 01225 444439

North East Somerset Victim Support – 01761 432212

People experiencing domestic violence can also talk in confidence to a Housing Adviser – contact number 01225 396296

**Adults can be abused too
It ought to be reported**

This document/publication/leaflet about 'Abuse of Vulnerable Adults in Bath and North East Somerset' can be made available in a range of community languages, large print, Braille, on tape, electronic and accessible formats from the Information Officer (information_officer@bathnes.gov.uk) - Tel (01225 477983) Minicom (01225 477043)