



# Early warning signs

**Abuse and neglect can happen to anybody. It can be caused by anyone, including family members or friends, professionals or staff, another adult with support needs, or a stranger. It can also happen anywhere, including in an adult's own home, a care home, health setting, or in a public place.**

For safeguarding, we need to be aware of the signs of abuse and neglect for adults with care and support needs, who may need us to take action to help safeguard them.

## What do we mean by 'early warning signs'?

Early warning signs are the first signs and symptoms that suggest that something isn't quite right. These could be small changes, which family members, friends, staff, or members of the public may notice, especially if they know the adult well. Exactly what these signs and symptoms are, will depend on the type of abuse or neglect, which we'll take a look at now.

## What are the types of abuse?

The Care Act 2014 defines ten types of abuse and neglect. Examples of each of these are included below (this is not an exhaustive list):

- **Physical abuse:** hitting, kicking, burning, or giving wrong medication;
- **Neglect:** not getting the help, food, or healthcare needed;
- **Self-neglect:** not looking after your own needs;
- **Financial abuse:** stealing money or possessions, or controlling money;
- **Domestic abuse:** any form of abuse from someone that you live with;
- **Sexual abuse:** unwanted sexual contact or sending sexual pictures;
- **Psychological or emotional abuse:** shouting, threats, or cyber bullying;
- **Discrimination:** abuse based on disability, age, ethnicity, gender, religion, or sexuality;
- **Modern slavery:** working without pay or not being paid enough;
- **Organisational abuse:** poor care, neglect, or poor practice within an organisation.

## What early warning signs should we be looking out for?

### Emotional changes

You may notice changes in someone's mood; they may appear depressed, withdrawn, angry, or appear to have low self-esteem. You may also notice an increase in anxiety or stress, including someone appearing to be more tearful.

### Physical changes

You may notice changes in how someone is presenting physically. This could include changes in the clothes they are wearing or appearing to be unwashed. They could also appear to be losing or gaining weight, sleeping more or less than usual, or experiencing new health symptoms, such as headaches or stomach aches.

### Changes to routines

You may notice that someone is going out more or less than usual, or missing appointments or other responsibilities. This could extend to changes in their financial arrangements, such as having more or less money available to them, or missing possessions.

### Changes to the home environment

There may be changes to the home environment which are concerning you. Examples of this could include an increase in clutter, damage to the property, or even an increase in visits to the property by people you don't know.

## What should you do if you become aware of a safeguarding concern?

**If you are concerned about an adult with care and support needs and have noticed any of these early warning signs of abuse and neglect, you should report this to the local authority.**

The best way to report your concerns is by completing a safeguarding referral online [via the West Sussex County Council website](#).

Alternatively, if you wish to speak with someone by phone, you can call 01243 642121 if you are a member of the public, or 03302 228400 if you are a member of staff.

Before submitting a safeguarding referral, members of staff should consult the [Sussex Safeguarding Adults Thresholds](#).