



# Organisational abuse

**Organisational abuse, also sometimes referred to as institutional abuse, is one of the ten types of abuse and neglect defined in the Care Act (2014). It refers to poor care or safeguarding risks, including neglect, because of the arrangements, processes, and practices within an institution or care setting.**

## What does organisational abuse look like in practice?

It's not always easy to recognise organisational abuse as we may find that the abuse or neglect is less obvious than other forms we're more familiar with. We know from our learning reviews, though, that it's essential that we're aware of the potential for organisational abuse, and what it might look like.

Organisational abuse includes neglect and poor staff practice within an organisation, such as in a hospital or care home. It can include repeated incidents or ongoing ill-treatment, and can look like:

- inappropriate use of restraint or restrictive practices;
- not providing adults with appropriate choice over aspects of their life, such as food, clothing, or their own schedule, such as bedtimes;
- not providing adults with a safe environment;
- not respecting adults as individuals, with their own beliefs and cultural backgrounds, and/or discriminatory abuse;
- restricting contact with friends and family; and/or professionals, and
- abuse, which is physical, verbal, psychological, emotional, or financial.

## How does organisational abuse occur?

We don't assume that staff in health and social care settings set out to engage in neglectful or harmful practices when they enter into the workforce. We know, though, that there are a number of risk factors for organisational abuse developing, so it's important that we are aware of these. It's also essential to be mindful that we don't become complicit in organisational abuse by failing to recognise, report, or respond to poor practice or abuse in our workplaces.

Inquiries into organisational abuse in health and social care settings have shown that the main risk factors for the development of organisational abuse are:

- a lack of adequate training for staff, leaving them unprepared for the work they are undertaking;
- a lack of supervision for staff, which means that poor practice is not identified and corrected before it is embedded into everyday practice;
- insufficient management oversight and support, which means that staff are not being held accountable for their actions; and
- failure to share and embed learning in relation to good practice and new approaches to care.

We can see from these risk factors that workplace culture is hugely important when it comes to abuse and neglect within organisations. In some cases, these risk factors can indicate a 'closed culture'. The Care Quality Commission has useful information about [identifying and responding to closed cultures \(2022\)](#).

### How can we mitigate against these risks?

Fostering an open and supportive workplace culture is key to mitigating these identified risk factors for organisational abuse. Organisations should:

- ensure that all staff are appropriately trained for their role, and know how to access support, without judgement, when faced with challenges;
- have robust supervision processes for staff, which may include an element of regular practice observation, as appropriate;
- provide opportunities for constructive feedback to be shared at all levels of practice, and to model effective and professional dialogue between staff;
- ensure that their staff know where to access, and how to implement, a Whistleblowing Policy, as well as the Sussex Escalation and Resolution Protocol when disagreements arise;
- have a strategy for sharing sector improvements, including learning from local and national Safeguarding Adults Reviews and audits.

### What should I do if I am concerned about organisational abuse?

**If you are concerned about organisational abuse or neglect, you should:**

- submit a [safeguarding referral](#) to the local authority, and/or contact the police if there are concerns of a criminal nature;
- if possible, discuss your concerns with the organisation involved;
- if this is not possible, or the response you receive is unsatisfactory, refer to your organisation's Whistleblowing Policy.