



Tool for detecting situations of mistreatment of older adults

Produced by

**Direction des communications du ministère
de la Santé et des Services sociaux**

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Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux
Direction des communications
Diffusion
1075, chemin Sainte-Foy, 2nd floor
Québec City, Québec G1S 2M1

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This tool is intended for anyone working with older adults

(Practitioners, professionals, managers, volunteers, home care workers, police officers, community workers and community partners.)

This tool will allow you to:

- recognize the signs of mistreatment
- know how to react and what to do if you witness mistreatment
- refer a person you think may be mistreated to appropriate support resources

What is mistreatment?

- Mistreatment is a singular or repeated act, a word, an attitude or lack of appropriate action that causes harm or distress to an older adult.
- It occurs in a relationship where there is an expectation of trust.
- It can be intentional or unintentional.
- It can be committed by an individual, a community, or an organization.

What does mistreatment look like?

Mistreatment can take two forms:

- **Violence:** rough handling a person or forcing them to act against their will, through the use of force or intimidation.
- **Neglect:** failing to care for a person, including the failure to appropriately respond to their needs.



Consequences of mistreatment:

- Temporary or permanent physical injury
- Increased morbidity
- Loss of financial resources
- Anxiety, low self-esteem, depression
- Deprivation of essential goods
- Self isolation
- Increased feelings of insecurity
- Increased number of visits to emergency rooms
- Suicidal thoughts and destructive behaviour
- Social avoidance and loss of contact with relatives, friends or neighbors

What are the different types of mistreatment?

Mistreatment is a complex issue because there can be several types of mistreatment in one situation. Find out what warning signs to look for. Consult the following chart.

BE CAREFUL!

Warning signs must always be verified to ensure that they are truly associated with mistreatment and not as a result of something else.

Types of mistreatment	What should you look for? Here are some of the signs of mistreatment
Psychological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear, anxiety, depression • Withdrawal, reluctance to speak openly, mistrust • Fearful interaction with one or more people • Rapid decline of cognitive abilities • Suicidal ideation, attempted suicide, suicide
Physical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bruises or injuries • Weight loss • Deteriorating health • Poor hygiene • Undue delay in changing of incontinence briefs • Unsanitary living environment • Muscular atrophy • Use of restraints • Premature or suspicious death
Sexual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infections • Genital wounds • Anxiety when being examined or receiving care • Mistrust, withdrawal, depression • Sexual disinhibition • Sudden use of highly sexualized comments • Denial of older adult's sexuality.
Material or financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unusual banking transactions • Disappearance of valuable items • Lack of money for regular expenses

Types of mistreatment	What should you look for? Here are some of the signs of mistreatment
Organizational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treating the person as a number • Complaints or reports to diverse instances • Undue delay in service deliveries • Deterioration of the person's physical - psychological - social health
Ageism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failure to recognize a person's rights, skills or knowledge • Use of infantilizing language
Violation of human rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not respecting decision-making • Preventing or blocking a person from participating in choices and decisions that concern them • A relative consistently answering questions on behalf of the older adult • Restriction of visits or access to information • Complaints or reporting to various authorities

Source: Plan d'action gouvernemental pour contrer la maltraitance envers les personnes âgées 2022-2027 : Reconnaître et agir ensemble, p. 9-12

What risk factors can increase the likelihood of mistreatment?

Environmental factors that place the older adult at greater risk:

- Living with one or many family members
- Conflict with family members or friends
- Lack of access to resources or living in a location that is isolated
- Social isolation, limited social network
- Financial dependency related to immigration/sponsorship
- Sharing a living environment
- Tension in a caregiving relationship between the older adult and the caregiver
- Living alone



What factors can make an older adult more vulnerable to mistreatment?

Mistreatment can happen to anyone.

Nevertheless, individual factors may make a person more vulnerable:

- Major neurocognitive disorders
- Low income
- Mental health problems
- Physical limitations
- History of violence and neglect
- Alcohol and/or drug addiction
- Gender (female)
- Hostile or passive behavior
- Lack of coping strategies
- Level of education
- High levels of stress and poor stress-management skills

BE CAREFUL!

Risks factors are not indicators of mistreatment.

- Mistreatment can happen to anyone.
- A person may have only one risk factor and be in a situation of mistreatment.
- A person may have several risk factors, but not be in a situation of mistreatment.

What should you do if you suspect mistreatment?

Create a trusting environment and listen attentively to what the person has to say.

- Make sure to create a **safe space** and be alert to potential threats.
- Find a moment when you will be **alone with the person** to share your concerns.
- **Give them time** to decide what they want to do and **respect their choices**.
- Ask them if they would like to talk to **someone they trust** (doctor, social worker, financial planner, nurse, etc.).
- Offer to accompany them to the appropriate resource.
- If they do not wish to discuss the situation:
 - Leave the door open and let them know **that you are available if they need you**;
 - see the following page for additional **resources**.



Here are some examples of questions you can ask

Ask open-ended questions. Avoid being too direct and give the older adult the time needed to respond.

- How are you doing?
- How are things at home?
- How do you see your situation?
- You seem worried about your finances. What is bothering you?
- Is there someone who makes you feel uncomfortable?
- How can I help you?

If you suspect mistreatment, direct the older adult to the following resources:

- The **Mistreatment Helpline**
1-888-489-2287
- The **Info-Social hotline: 811**
- The local service quality and complaints commissioner
- **911** if the situation is an **emergency**

Consult the link below to find your local health and social services resource:

[Québec.ca/en/health/finding-a-resource](https://quebec.ca/en/health/finding-a-resource)

For more information on the mistreatment of older adults and support resources:

[Québec.ca/MaltraitanceAînés](https://quebec.ca/MaltraitanceAînés)

As a witness, you have an important role to play in preventing the mistreatment of older adults.

If you need guidance, call the
Mistreatment Helpline
1 888 489-2287

lignemaltraitance.ca/en

8 a.m. to 8 p.m., 7 days a week

Québec.ca/MaltraitanceAînés

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