

Guide for service providers:

understanding and responding to psychological abuse

What is psychological abuse?

Psychological abuse, also known as emotional abuse, involves any verbal or non-verbal actions that cause mental anguish, fear, distress, or a sense of worthlessness in another person.

Who may be at increased risk

- Older people
- People living with disability
- People who rely on others for care or support
- People experiencing isolation, mental health issues, or cognitive changes

What psychological abuse can look like

Psychological abuse may be subtle and difficult to detect. It can include:

- yelling, insulting, threatening, or humiliating the person
- intimidation, including menacing behaviour or gestures
- gaslighting – manipulating someone to doubt their own thoughts, feelings or memories
- isolating the person from family, friends, or support networks
- blaming, controlling, shaming or criticising, constantly withholding affection, attention, or communication
- threatening to withdraw care, services, or support
- using disability, language, or age to belittle or control.

Consider your reporting requirements

If someone is in immediate danger, call:


 **000** (emergency services).

If you are an NDIS provider or aged care worker:

- Report internally according to your organisation's safeguarding or incident management policy.

Consider whether to make a report to:

- **NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission** (if person is an NDIS participant)
- **Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission** (if person is in aged care).



Work with the adult to plan next steps

Practical steps you can take:

- If you can speak to the person alone, sensitively raise your observations and ask them if they want support to address the abuse.
- Offer to support the person to access advocacy, counselling or legal advice (refer to the **Contacts for Safeguarding Assistance Information Sheet** for more information about who to contact).
- If the person declines help, keep communication open and offer future support. If you remain concerned inform your manager/supervisor.
- Document your concerns factually and clearly.



If you are unsure the Adult Safeguarding Unit can provide free, confidential information, advice and support.

A copy of the **Contacts for Safeguarding Assistance Information Sheet** is available for agencies.

Contact us:



1800 372 310

(weekdays 9:00am to 4:00pm)




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Remember: safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Your actions can protect a person from ongoing harm and help restore their dignity, rights, and safety.



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