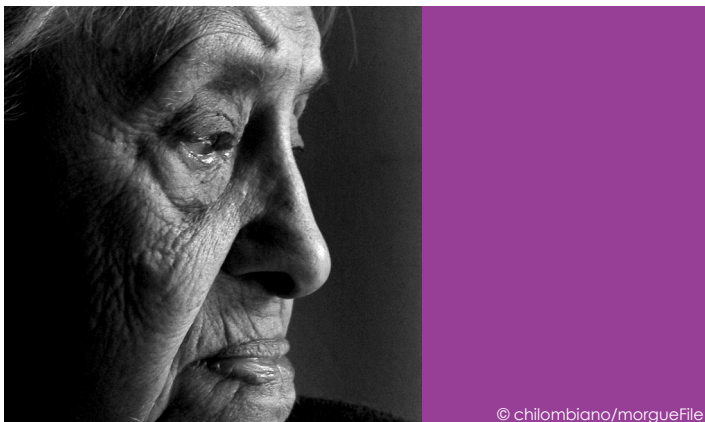


A Victim-Centered Approach

Victim-centered advocacy restores control to victims. No matter the age of the victim, service providers should maintain a victim-centered approach when planning services. The advocates' role is to explore options with older victims, to help them identify and remove obstacles, and to honor and support their decisions, taking into account age-related generational and cultural values.

When there are concerns about an older adult's cognitive capacity, a victim-centered approach includes working with health care providers to assess the individual's situation. In some cases, what appears to be limited or diminished cognitive capacity can be a temporary condition that is the result of trauma, inappropriate medications, infection, or lack of sleep, food, or fluids.

For more information on victim-centered advocacy, please see the book, *Safety Planning with Battered Women: Complex Lives/Difficult Choices*.



Guiding Principles for Working with Older Individuals

Focus on victim safety.

- Recognize that victims are resilient and have often engaged in strategies to keep themselves safe. Advocates should build on the strategies older victims are already using.
- Create a safety plan with older victims, taking into consideration any physical and cognitive limitations. For safety planning tips, please visit:

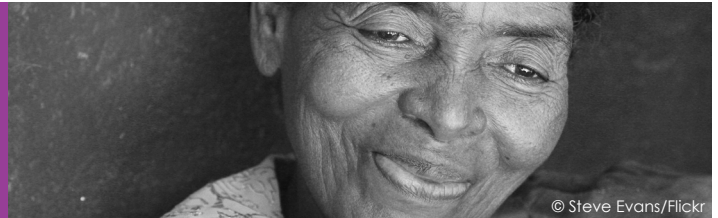
www.ncall.us/gethelp/safetyplanning.

Be aware of and avoid assumptions about what is best for victims.

- Avoid succumbing to ageism. Don't assume all older adults are frail, mentally incompetent, and/or asexual. Approach older victims with the same respect, sensitivity, and open-mindedness afforded to all victims.
- Identify and build upon older victims' strengths and skills.
- Respect cultural and religious traditions and recognize the importance of these values and rituals in shaping older victims' lives and decisions.



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Respect victim confidentiality and privacy.

Confidentiality statutes and guidelines govern advocates' responses. These legal requirements include federal and state laws mandating advocates to have a fully informed, signed, and time-limited release of information before any discussion may occur regarding the victim's situation. For more information on confidentiality, please visit:

www.ncall.us/content/confidentiality.

Know your state's mandatory reporting law for elder abuse.

Most states have mandatory reporting laws for elder abuse. Reports are commonly made to adult protective services or law enforcement. To learn more about mandatory reporting considerations, please go to: www.ncall.us/content/mr.

Acknowledge and address victims' challenges and fears.

- Many older victims want to maintain a relationship with their abuser. The abuser may be an intimate partner, adult child, other family member, or a caregiver. The victim may want help ending the abuse while still finding a way to have a connection with the abuser. Advocates should consider these views when safety planning.
- Some older victims have vision, hearing, or mobility challenges and may need help addressing medical or disability issues as they evaluate their options. Consider working with health care providers, local Centers for Independent Living (CILs), and Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs).
- Some older victims may have cognitive limitations such as dementia, developmental

disabilities, or a traumatic brain injury that make it difficult or impossible for them to determine what they want to do and to follow-through with their plans. For more information, please see: "Screening for Abuse and Neglect of People with Dementia." *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*, 58, 493-500.

- Older lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) individuals may be concerned about how others will react to their choice of a life partner or their gender identity if they talk to someone about the abuse. For more information about providing support for LGBT victims, please consult: www.centeronelderabuse.org/docs/ResearchBrief_LGBT_Elders_508web.pdf and visit: www.sageusa.org/resources/publications.cfm.
- Older immigrants may fear deportation and need information about specific legal remedies such as U Visas. For more information, please visit the National Immigrant Women's Advocacy Project at: www.wcl.american.edu/niwap/.

“The most important thing was they never gave up on me, they never judged me for what I said. They were just really great...it helped me just to be there with them. It seems like whenever I needed someone the most there was a little knock on my door.”

– An older survivor on her experience with a support group and shelter for older women



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Provide a safe, accessible environment for older victims.

- Consider the need for transportation assistance, access to mobility devices such as wheelchairs, walkers, or canes, and other medical or assistive devices.
- Be aware of the physical needs of older victims. Ensure they have access to their medication and food and are able to rest when needed. Ask if they need glasses to see printed materials or if they need material printed in larger font. Ask if they need to meet in a quiet space to hear and to have a conversation.
- Shelters and transitional housing programs should be prepared to house service animals. For information about service animals, go to: www.disabilityrightswi.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/Service-Animals-Paper-2011.pdf and visit: www.animalsandfamilies.org.

“All of a sudden I find this group... that's how I found a big difference, a huge difference. I felt alone, I'm not alone anymore.”

– An older survivor on her experience with a support group for older women

- Create or obtain a list of certified/qualified interpreters (foreign language and American Sign Language) to contact **in advance** of meeting with a victim. Persons for whom spoken English is their second language may require interpreters to understand their options. **Never** ask family members or individuals who are bilingual but not trained interpreters to translate.
- Use resources that are accessible to older victims. Printed materials and web pages should have large, readable fonts and feature pictures of older adults. When possible, maximize the contrast of web pages, including graphics, fonts, and backgrounds. For more information, please visit: www.lighthouse.org/accessibility/.

Work collaboratively.

- With the older victims' permission, refer to appropriate agencies for support and assistance.
- Consult with professionals in a variety of fields on complicated cases to expand available options and ensure that victims don't fall through the cracks.

Additional information sheets may be found at: www.ncall.us/content/ALL.

References

- Davies, J., Lyon, E. & Monti-Catania, D. 1998. *Safety Planning with Battered Women: Complex Lives/Difficult Choices*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Wiglesworth A, Mosqueda, L., Munard R., Liao, S., Gibbs, L. & Fitzgerald, W. 2010. “Screening for Abuse and Neglect of People with Dementia.” *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*, 58:493-500.

The National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life (NCALL) focuses on program and policy development, technical assistance, and training on abuse in later life: the nexus between domestic violence, sexual assault, and elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation. For more information please visit: www.ncall.us or call: 608-255-0539.

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