

Physical and Emotional Abuse

Participant Guide

November 2026

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Module 0. Manual Guide

0.1. Partners and Acknowledgments

The curriculum was originally created by NAPSA in collaboration with the Academy for Professional Excellence. It was then used as a foundation for training content and materials developed by NAPSA under the grant for the National APS Training Center.

The creation of this curriculum was the result of a collaborative effort between Adult Protective Services professionals, professional educators, and NAPSA members. NAPSA would like to thank the following:

Committees

NAPSA Education Committee

NAPSA Curriculum Development Committee

NAPSA Curriculum Review Committee

No AI was used in the development of this curriculum.

0.2. Course Summary

In this interactive and engaging introductory training, participants will gain a basic understanding of physical and emotional abuse. This understanding will enhance their ability to conduct investigations and develop effective strength-based service plans when working with people who have experienced abuse.

0.3. Target Audience

The course is intended for new APS professionals who investigate allegations of physical and/or emotional abuse. Tenured staff and allied professionals may also benefit from this training.

0.4. Course Requirements

There are no course requirements. It may be helpful for participants to have some experience in safety and service planning.

0.5. Goal

The purpose of this training is to enable APS professionals and allied professionals to have a better understanding of the signs, indicators, impacts, and interventions for physical and emotional abuse.

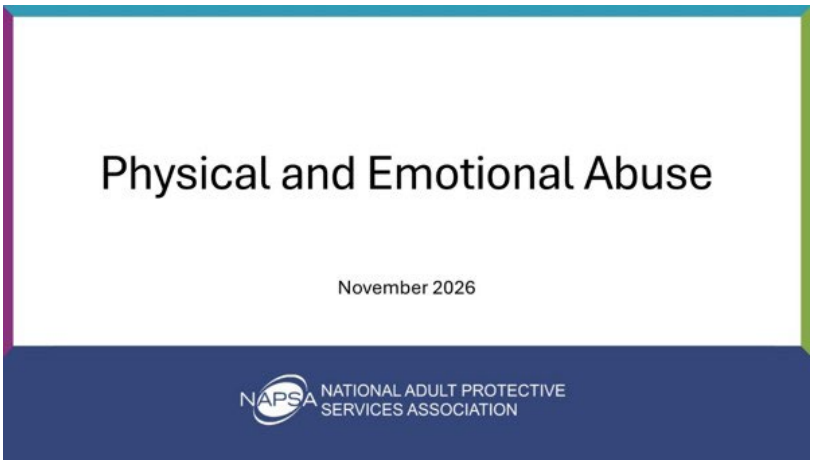
0.6. Learning Objectives

After completing this course, participants will be able to:

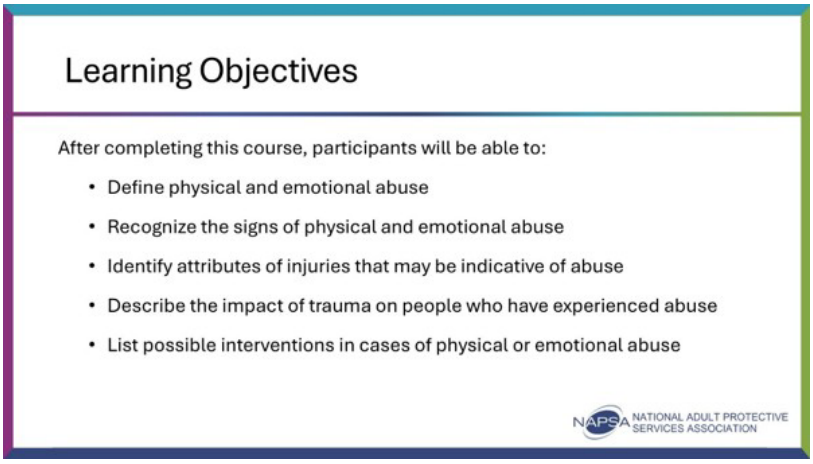
- Define physical and emotional abuse
- Recognize the signs of physical and emotional abuse
- Identify attributes of injuries that may be indicative of abuse

- Describe the impact of trauma on people who have experienced abuse
- List possible interventions in cases of physical or emotional abuse

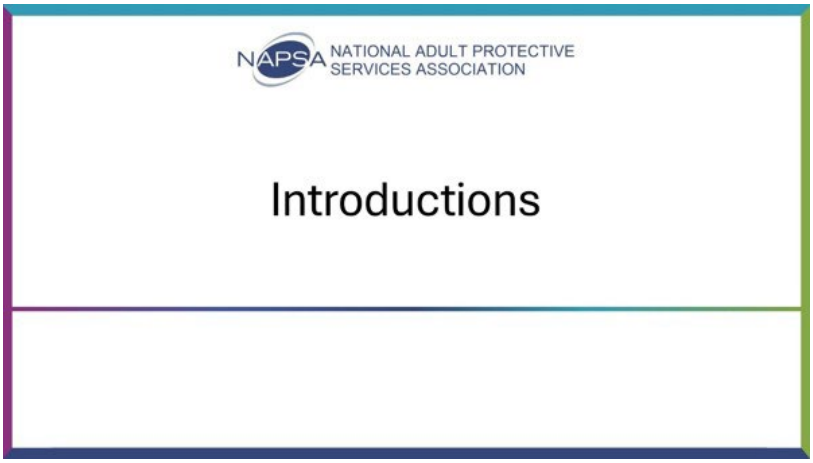
Module 1. Welcome and Overview



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Module 2. An Introduction to Abuse

Defining Abuse

Abuse: "knowing infliction of physical or psychological harm, or the knowing deprivation of goods or services that are necessary to meet essential needs, or to avoid physical or psychological harm."

Today's focus is on physical and emotional abuse **in general**.

What we discuss may or may not match the criteria to begin an investigation or substantiate an allegation of abuse in your area.

(Federal Register, 2023)

Notes:

Types of Physical Abuse

- Hitting, striking, or beating (with or without an object)
- Pushing, shoving, or shaking
- Slapping or pinching
- Kicking
- Burning
- Use of physical restraints
- Force-feeding
- Physical punishments
- Use of medication or drugs to harm or control

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Notes:

Medication as Control

Using medication to control someone may be classified as physical abuse, emotional abuse, or both.

Medications can be misused to:

- Sedate
- Cause confusion or delirium
- Diminish the ability to leave or report abuse
- Give the appearance of a lack of decision-making ability

Medications used properly can cause side effects or allergic reactions.

Notes:

Reports of Abuse

In some cases, the initial report will include suspicions or descriptions of abuse.

In others, the initial report may not.

Explicit disclosures: direct statements of the experience of abuse.

- She hit me with the back of her hand
- He threatened my life

Coded disclosures: hints or descriptions that may indicate abuse

- He gets mean when he drinks whiskey
- I don't like it when she's mad

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Notes:

Signs and Indicators of Physical Abuse

You will observe signs that may indicate physical abuse.

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Notes:

Signs and Indicators of Physical Abuse: Bruises

Bruises: Visible patches of discoloration on the skin from broken blood vessels. Bruises can be a variety of colors, but the color of a bruise cannot reliably determine when the injury occurred.

- Bruises on the face, upper arms, neck, or other places not usually injured
- Bilateral bruises (at the same place on both sides of the body)
- Unexplained bruises
- Bruises in several places on the body at once
- Bruises that reflect shapes
- Bruises that regularly appear after certain events

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Notes:

Special Notes about Bruises

Deep bruises, like those that accompany fractures, may take days to appear.

Deep bruises may take months to fully heal.

Some medications, like blood thinners, can increase the risk of bruising from everyday events or tasks.

The color of a bruise is affected by the color of a person's skin.

On darker skin tones, bruises in later stages of healing may not be as easily visible.

Notes:

Signs and Indicators of Physical Abuse: Cuts, Burns, and Bites

Cuts and Scrapes (or scarring that indicates healed cuts or scrapes)

- Especially in unusual places: mouth, lips, gums, eyes, genitals

Burns and Scalds

- Burns that look like an item, cigarette, or appliance
- Immersion burns or scalds: clear edges that reflect immersion depth
- Burns in specific locations: soles of the feet, palms of the hands, back
- Burns may look red, swell, peel, blister, or turn white, brown, or black

Bite Marks

- Animal or human

Notes:

Signs and Indicators of Physical Abuse: Welts and Restraint Injuries

Welts: raised, often red areas on the skin caused by irritation or a strike

- A pattern of welts may indicate strokes like lashes from a whip
- Random welts may indicate insect bites or exposure to irritants

Restraint Injuries

- Bruises, welts, or cuts that may reflect the shape of a restraint
- Friction injuries like rope burns or irritation from chafing
- Skin breakdown:
  - Early stage: persistent redness or irritation
  - Later stage: blisters, tears, and pressure ulcers

(Biology Insights, 2026; My Nursing Home Abuse Guide, 2026)

Notes:

Signs and Indicators of Physical Abuse: Ears, Eyes, and Mouth

Ear Injuries:

- Sudden or unexplained hearing loss or ringing
- Dizziness, nausea, sensitivity to noise
- Bruising or tearing to the outer ear

(WE Survive Abuse, 2026)

Eye Injuries:

- Retinal hemorrhage (bleeding in the retina)
- Intraocular hemorrhage (bleeding inside the eye)

(Cleveland Clinic, 2026; ScienceDirect, n.d.)

Mouth Injuries:

- Lost or broken teeth, especially unexplained
- Discolored or dead teeth from impacts
- Repeated, unexplained, or inadequately explained injuries inside the mouth
- Bruises suggesting gags

(Cleveland Clinic, 2026)

Notes:

Signs and Indicators of Physical Abuse: Dislocations and Fractures

Dislocated Joints

- Particularly repeated or unexplained dislocations
- The most common dislocation is at the shoulder, but can occur anywhere

Fractures: any break in a bone, whether partial or complete

- Repeated, multiple, or unexplained fractures
- Old fractures or areas with historic fractures may indicate chronic abuse
- **Spiral fractures:** fractures caused by the twisting of a bone or a sudden jerk that twists the bone out of its usual position, indicating serious trauma

(Boston Children's Hospital, n.d.)

Notes:

Signs and Indicators of Physical Abuse: Neck Injuries and Coma

Signs of neck injuries: vocal hoarseness, small bruises in the eyes and eyelids, ligature marks or hand prints, bruises or swelling, changes to posture.

Strangulation can cause lasting, invisible damage. Effects include:

- Memory problems and confusion
- Dizziness or headaches
- Difficulty swallowing or breathing
- Vomiting blood

Coma may be the result of shaking, strangulation, or other abuse. Any coma with an unknown cause should be suspected.

(Arismendy, n.d.)

Notes:

Signs and Indicators of Physical Abuse: Behavioral Indicators

- Disclosure of pain without the appearance of a physical injury
  - The injury occurred in the past, resulting in chronic pain
  - The abuse created pain without visible signs
- Anxiety, agitation, or fear around a person, people, location, task, or object
- Depression, shame, and guilt
- Nightmares or insomnia
- Self-isolation, or avoiding certain places or people
- Reports of past mistreatment
- Previous attempts to leave a place or people

Notes:

Medical Professionals

Medical professionals can help identify and treat injuries.

- In many cases, assist the person in obtaining medical treatment
- If the person reports pain with no visible injuries, physicians can help
- Medical professionals can also provide information on potential causes
- Medical professionals can help you determine whether an explanation for an injury is reasonable
  - Expertise with injuries
  - Understanding of the person's medications, underlying health conditions, and medical history

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Notes:

Accident or Abuse?

Many signs that might indicate abuse have other explanations.

Ask yourself: Is this a reasonable explanation?

Remember: all of these scenarios require further investigation before any allegation can be substantiated!

Notes:

Accident or Abuse: George

Observations	Explanation
• Bruises on both upper arms, thighs, and back • Some bruises are pale yellow, others are dark purple and red • Carpeted bedroom	Caregiver says: George fell out of his wheelchair while trying to navigate his bedroom

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Notes:

Accident or Abuse: Edie

Observations	Explanation
• Bruises from her shoulder to her knee down her right side • Scrape on the palm of her right hand • Broken right ankle	Edie says: While she was walking a big dog, the dog was startled and ran, pulling her off the curb before she could let go of the leash.

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Notes:

Accident or Abuse: Thomas

Observations	Explanation
• Indistinct speech • No visible bruises on his face • Small, red bruises on the insides of his lips • Cheeks appear swollen • Adult son's presence causes Thomas to lower his head and look at his lap	Thomas says: He often bites his tongue and cheeks by accident.

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Notes:

Accident or Abuse: Takeaways

- Accidental injuries tend to occur on the shins, hands, elbows, or forehead
- A large number of injuries, or injuries of various ages, are more likely to be signs of abuse
- The size and shape of marks can indicate an object used to harm someone
- The explanation of the event or events should match the appearance and presence of the injuries… AND the abilities of the injured person
- A person's demeanor can be an indicator of abuse

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Notes:

Module 3. An Introduction to Emotional Abuse

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Emotional Abuse

Notes:

Identifying Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse can be difficult to identify.

Even when an action isn't part of your state or territory's definition of emotional abuse, it may affect someone's emotional, physical, or behavioral well-being.

Common intentions of emotional abuse:

- Domination or control
- Isolating the person from others
- Frightening or causing fear
- Diminishing self-worth or self-esteem
- Weakening defenses or resolve

How does the individual experience the behavior?

What is the broader context of the relationship or situation?

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Notes:

Signs and Indicators of Emotional Abuse: Actions by the Alleged Perpetrator

- Humiliation (in private and in front of others)
- Name-calling (stupid, disgusting, worthless, a burden)
- Getting angry in a way that's frightening
- Threatening to harm the person or their loved ones
- Threatening to or destroying or vandalizing the person's property
- Deciding things for the person, like what they wear or eat
- Acting jealous when the person spends time with others
- Pretending not to understand what the person is saying, making them feel stupid, refusing to listen to their thoughts and opinions
- Making the person's needs or feelings seem unimportant or less important

Notes:

Signs and Indicators of Emotional Abuse: Isolation

- Preventing or discouraging the person from seeing their friends or family
- Making the person stay in constant contact
  - Texting them constantly with "Where are you?" "What are you doing?" "Send a picture"
  - Repeatedly calling or expecting multiple phone calls
- Restricting the person's access to transportation
- Acting jealous of the time the person spends with other people
- Wanting or requiring the person to ask permission before spending time with other people

Notes:

Signs and Indicators of Emotional Abuse: Gaslighting

Gaslighting: changing or distorting reality to manipulate others.

- Minimizing an emotional reaction: "You're overreacting" or "You're so sensitive"
- Discrediting the person: "You're not really upset, you're just tired" or "Your memory's going in your old age"
- Withholding information or denying events: "That didn't happen" or "I have no idea what you're talking about"
- Becoming the victim: "How could you say I'd hurt you on purpose?" or "You screamed at me for no reason"
- The false apology: "I'm sorry you got upset" or "I'm sorry I work so hard"

Notes:

Signs and Indicators of Emotional Abuse: Animal Abuse

The abuse of a service animal or pet can be a form of emotional abuse.

- Threatening to harm or kill a pet as a form of coercion
- Harming or killing a pet to "get back at" or "punish"
- Releasing or "losing" a pet, or taking a pet to a shelter to "punish"

Notes:

Signs and Indicators of Emotional Abuse: Emotional Coercion

Emotional Coercion: manipulating through fear, obligation, or guilt.

Threatening to harm oneself or complete suicide to manipulate is an extreme form of emotional coercion.

When someone says they intend to harm or kill themselves, always take them seriously.

(Bryant, 2024; Mathews, 2025; Forward & Frazier, 1997)

Notes:

Polyvictimization

It's less common to encounter emotional abuse alone.

Polyvictimization: exposure to multiple types of abuse, neglect, or exploitation at the same time.

The presence of emotional abuse does not necessarily indicate polyvictimization.

However, emotional abuse is a frequent component of cases with polyvictimization.

(Ford & Delker, 2018; Ramsey-Klawsnik, 2017)

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Notes:

A Cause for Curiosity

Review scenarios: does anything indicate emotional abuse might be present?

Do any of the actions meet local requirements to investigate or allege emotional abuse?

Remember: all of these scenarios require further investigation before any allegation can be substantiated!

Notes:

A Cause for Curiosity: Gilbert

Gilbert is very religious. He used to attend church multiple times a week. His home is full of religious art. His favorite music is religious.

When his adult daughter moved in, she removed the religious decorations. She doesn't bring Gilbert to church and won't let him play his music because it "sounds stupid".

Is there anything about this brief scenario that might indicate emotional abuse?

Could this allegation be considered emotional abuse for APS purposes?

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Notes:

A Cause for Curiosity: Tabitha

Tabitha lives alone and collects animals. Her adult children have notified the authorities.

Hundreds of birds and cats were removed without Tabitha's prior knowledge or consent. Since the removal, Tabitha is deeply depressed and has expressed no longer wanting to live. Tabitha believes her family did it to be cruel.

Is there anything about this brief scenario that might indicate emotional abuse?

Could this allegation be considered emotional abuse for APS purposes?

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Notes:

A Cause for Curiosity: Harry

Harry has begun experiencing continence issues and wears protective underwear. While he's fully capable of dressing himself, his wife insists on "managing" his underwear.

She says, "Come on, pee-pants, time to change your diaper," even in public. When Harry expresses embarrassment, she says, "I'm joking, can't you take a joke?"

Is there anything about this brief scenario that might indicate emotional abuse?

Could this allegation be considered emotional abuse for APS purposes?

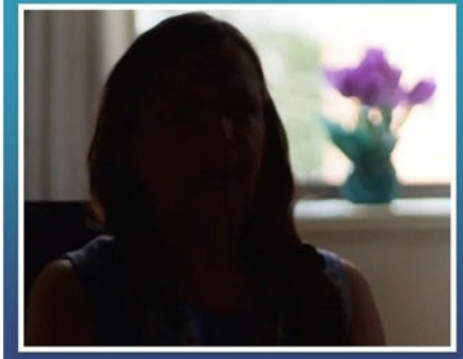
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Notes:

Video Debrief

What did you notice about the relationship between Mary Ann and her stalker?

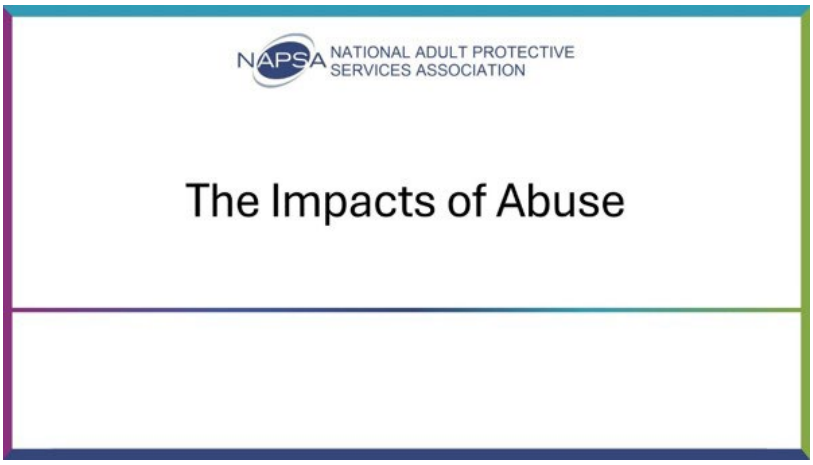
What actions did Mary Ann's stalker take that could be considered emotional abuse?



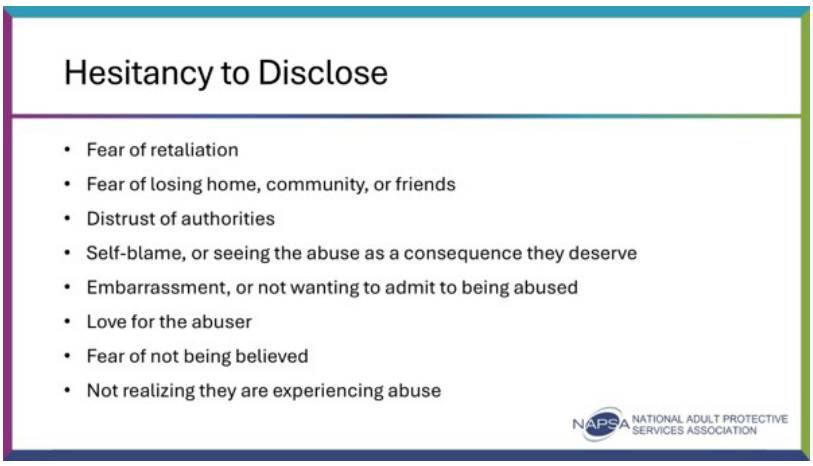
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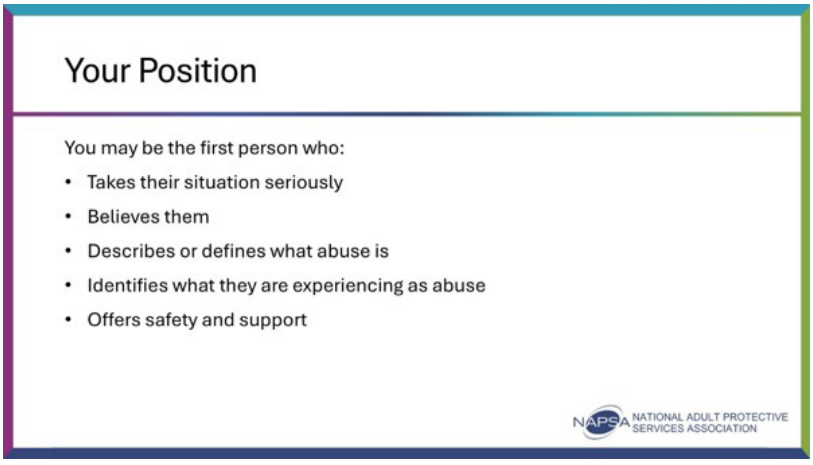
Module 4. The Impacts of Abuse



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Notes:

The Effects of Abuse

- Injuries
- Development of physical health conditions
- Exacerbation of existing physical conditions
- Development of mental health conditions
- Exacerbation of existing mental health conditions
- Loss of independence
- Loss of trust in caregivers or caregiving systems
- Feelings of guilt and shame
- Stress and stress-related health conditions
- Financial losses
- Premature death

(National Institute on Aging, n.d.)

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Notes:

Being Trauma-Informed

When we are **Trauma-Informed**, we:

- Understand the signs, symptoms, and impacts of trauma
- Resist re-traumatization by incorporating an understanding of trauma and safety into our practices

What changes when we have an understanding of trauma?
How do we actively seek to avoid re-traumatization?

(Trauma-Informed Care Institute, 2025)

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Notes:

Trauma

Trauma: a person's experience of emotional distress that is overwhelming. This can occur in response to an **event** or **threat of an event** that causes **physical, mental, or emotional harm.**

Impacts include:

- Acute shock or denial
- Reliving the traumatic event
- Depression
- Stress
- Physical responses
- Responses to reminders of the traumatic event
- Hypersensitivity to threats

Whether an event is traumatic depends on the person's experience, protective factors, and the care they receive afterward.

(Sussex Publishers, 2026; SAMHSA, 2026)

Notes:

Trauma-Informed Approaches

To take a trauma-informed approach:

- Prioritize the person's physical and psychological safety
- Be transparent
- Do what you say you will, and if you can't, be honest
- Collaborate with the person on safety planning
- Treat the person as an expert on their experience

(Trauma-Informed Care Institute, 2025)

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Notes:

The Experience of Emotional Abuse

Whether you can investigate an allegation of emotional abuse or not, documenting the person's experience is crucial to providing a full picture of their situation.

- How does the individual experience the emotional abuse?
- What words do they use to talk about it?
- How do others perceive the emotional abuse?
- Does anyone else join in? Are others upset by it?
- What does the individual think the emotional abuser's goal is?

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Notes:

Recovery Isn't Linear

Recovering from abuse is not linear, and can be unpredictable.

Abuse induces shame, guilt, feelings of self-blame, and confusion.

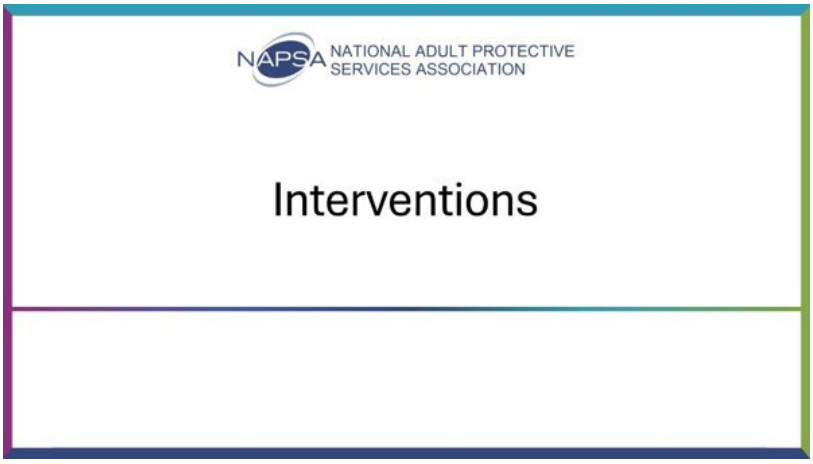
It's not uncommon for people to return to abusive situations, maintain contact with the people that hurt them, or otherwise remain connected to the abuse, particularly if the alleged perpetrator is a loved one.

Even if someone accepts an intervention or a safety plan, there may be a period of regret and minimization where the person will want to go back.

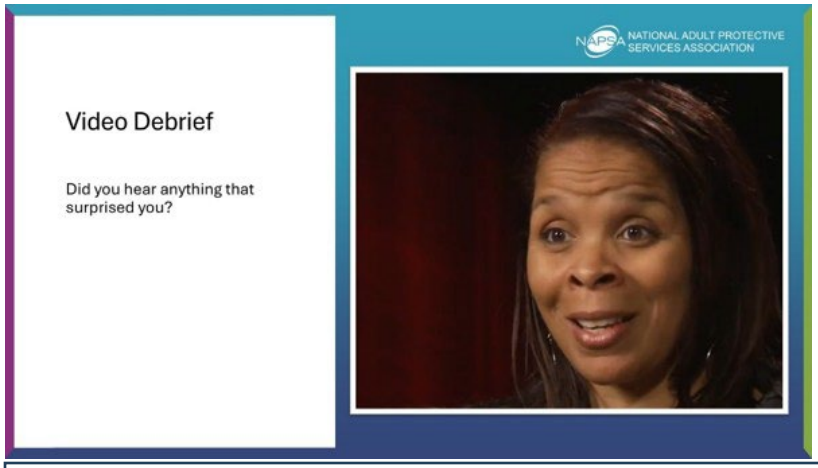
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Notes:

Module 5. Interventions



Notes:



Notes:

Notes:

Your Priorities

You CAN Prioritize	You CAN NOT Prioritize
• Making sure the person has information, resources, supports • Maintaining confidentiality • Putting the best interest of the person first while maximizing independence • Cultural considerations	• Obtaining justice or seeing the alleged perpetrator held accountable • Pressuring the person into reporting, pressing charges, or publicizing their abuse

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Notes:

Focus in on the Individual

Ask:

- How has the person been harmed and do they need immediate medical treatment?
- Is the person in continued danger?
- What are the person's wishes? What is their highest-priority need?
- What are the person's strengths and protective factors?
- Can they make decisions about their safety?
- Are there identity-based considerations?

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Notes:

Consider the Alleged Perpetrator

Ask:

- Who is the alleged perpetrator?
- What is their relationship, if any, to the person?
- Does the alleged perpetrator continue to pose a danger to the person or others?
- Is the alleged perpetrator responsible for the care, needs, finances, or other support? Will there be an interruption in care if the alleged abuser does not have access to the person?

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Notes:

Types of Intervention

Depending on the individual's wishes, physical intervention includes:

- Reduce the alleged perpetrator's access
  - Socially: asking them not to visit, limiting how they can visit, reducing the frequency of communication
  - Change the locks or create physical barriers to access
  - Relocation, if it's possible
- Reduce the individual's social isolation by increasing contact with supports
- Residential interventions like cameras, emergency signals, gun safes

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Notes:

The Reaction to Intervention

Interventions can increase the risk of danger.

There may be an increase in:

- Attempts at communication
- Presence
- Aggressive or unpredictable behavior

(Domestic Violence Services Network, 2022; Kippert, 2026)

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Notes:

Safety Planning

Safety planning must occur concurrently with any interventions.

Safety planning is a person-directed, collaborative process where the person makes informed choices about what they can and will do before, during, and after a crisis.

- Actions a person can take
- People they can call
- Places they can go
- Resources they can use
- Backup plans

Safety planning is unique to the person and their circumstances.

(Volunteers of America, Oregon, 2012)

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Notes:

Formal Restrictions: Orders of Protection

Order of Protection: a court order that can restrict someone (the respondent) by specifying what conduct is allowed or prohibited in regards to the petitioner.

Once signed by a judge, violation of the terms of the order can result in arrest.

The individual experiencing the abuse must petition for the order of protection. A third party can't petition for them.

Court self-help centers and domestic violence advocates can support.

(Legal Dictionary, 2019; Recording Law, 2026)

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Notes:

Law Enforcement

In cases of abuse, you may be more likely to see law enforcement involvement.

Prioritize your safety at all times.

Effective communication begins as early as possible. Law enforcement should know exactly what they will be asked to assist with.

Law enforcement may accompany you on face-to-face visits for your safety, to assist with an interaction with an alleged perpetrator, or to conduct a criminal investigation.

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Notes:

Professional Supports

Victim Service Advocates

- Professionals trained to support people through the criminal justice process
- Employed by the court system or by community organizations
- Community advocates can provide broader assistance

(Prosecuting Attorney's Office, n.d.)

Domestic Violence Advocates

- Also IPV Advocates
- Specialize in cases of Intimate Partner Violence
- Support provided to people of all genders

(The Legal Guide, 2026; Mayo, 2024)

Counselors or Therapists

- Individual therapy can be excellent; nobody is "too old" to benefit
- **Be careful:** marriage counselors and family therapists can unintentionally reinforce abuse or escalate conflict

(Baskerville, 2026)

Notes:

Resources and Services

When we're planning interventions or building safety plans, we can provide options, ideas, and flexibility in a situation where it's difficult to be creative.

National Resources include:

- National Domestic Violence Hotline – 800-799-SAFE or www.thehotline.org
- National Center for Victims of Crime - https://victimsofcrime.org/
- Survivors.org - https://survivors.org/national-resources/

What **local** resources, services, or programs do you know about?

Are there any you have collaborated with in the past?

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Notes:

5.1. Handout #1: Interventions for Mary Ann

Instructions: For this activity, you will be placed into breakout groups to discuss interventions for Mary Ann. You will have 10 minutes to discuss. Be sure to designate a spokesperson because, when we come back, each group will be asked to summarize their discussions.

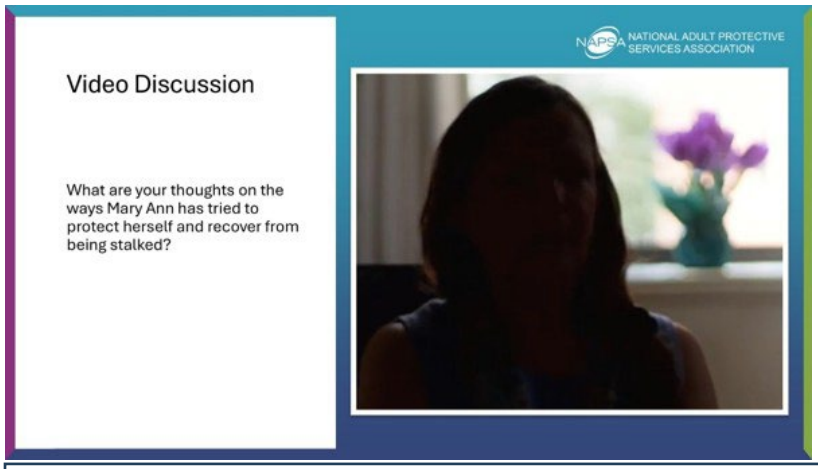
Discussion Questions:

1. What interventions would you suggest for Mary Ann?

Notes:

2. What would you discuss with Mary Ann to help keep her safe?

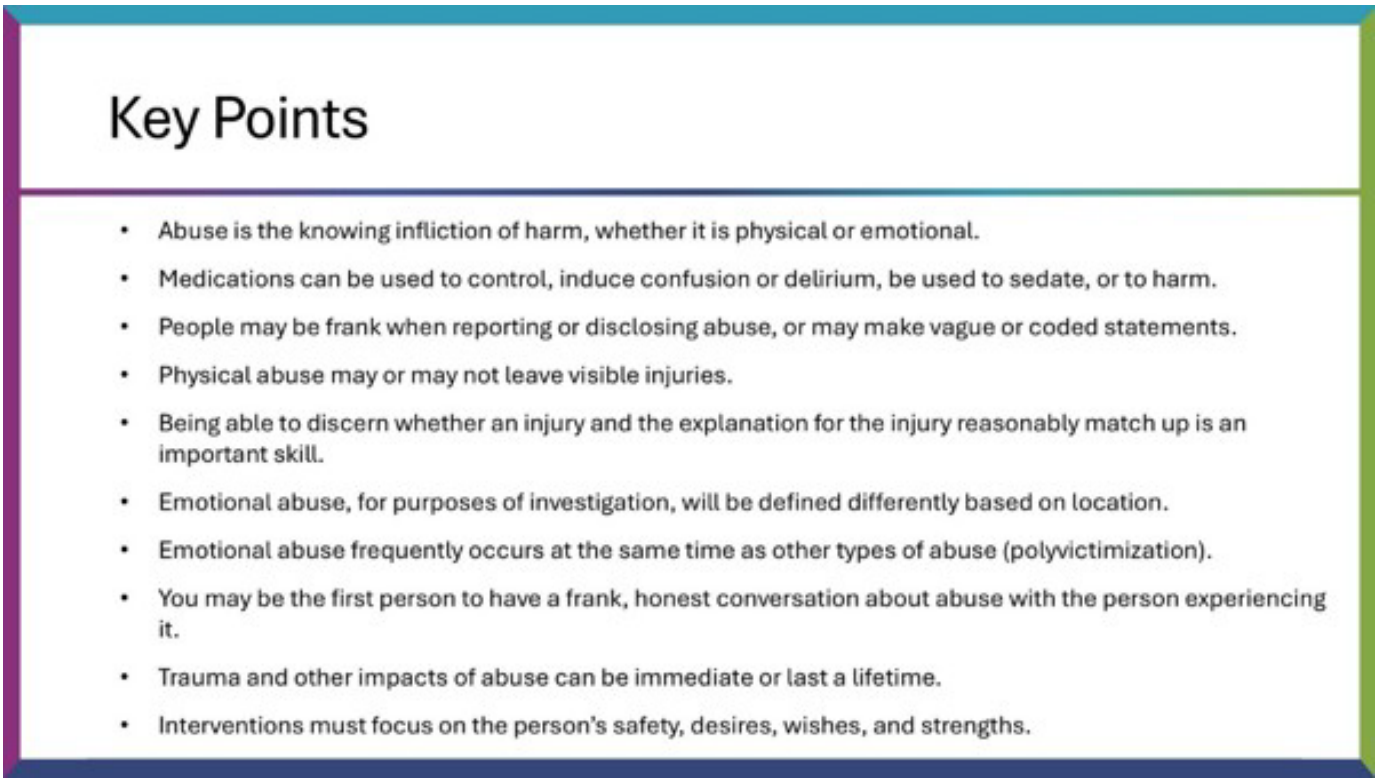
Notes:


Video Discussion
What are your thoughts on the ways Mary Ann has tried to protect herself and recover from being stalked?
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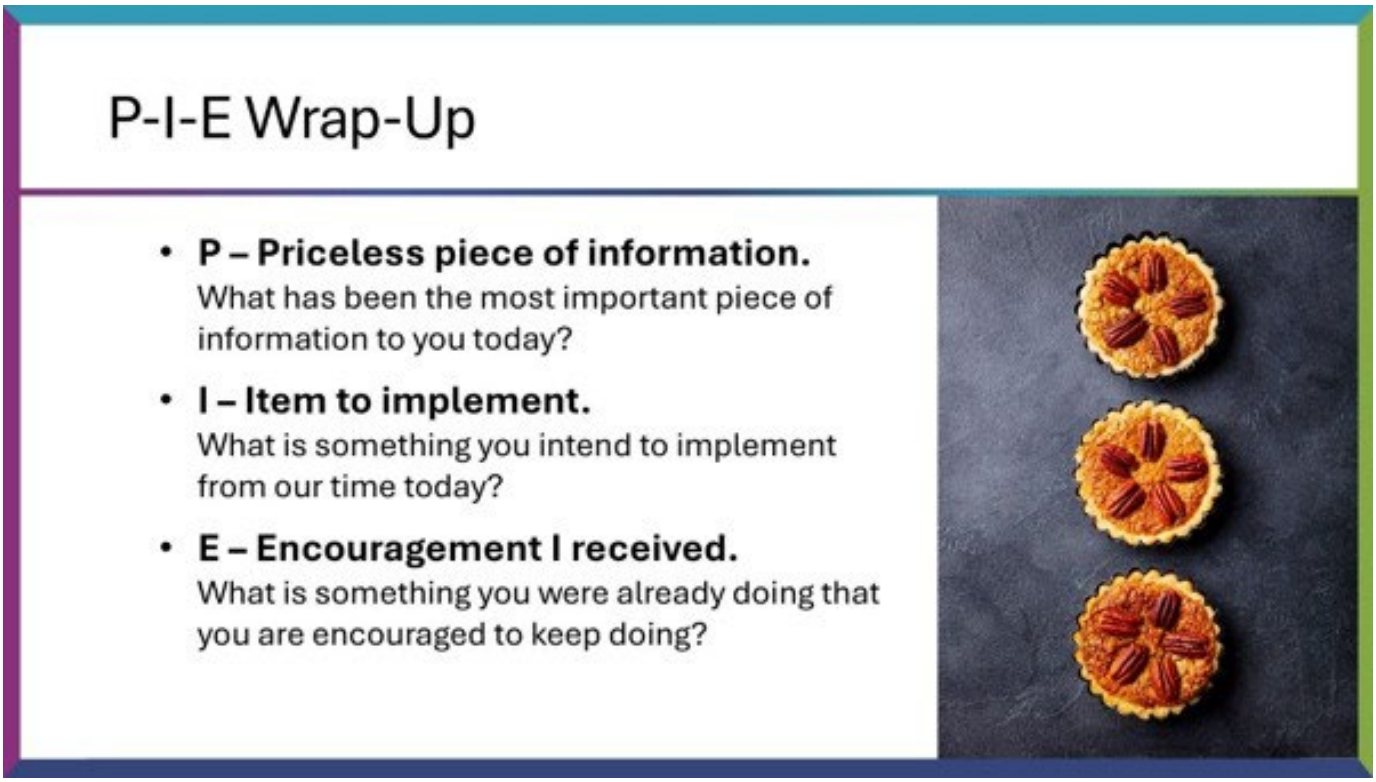
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Module 6. Wrap Up



Notes:



P – Priceless piece of information. What has been the most important piece of information to you today?

Notes:

I – Item to implement. What is something you intend to implement from our time today?

Notes:

E – Encouragement I received. What is something you were already doing that you were encouraged to keep doing?

Notes:

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