



Hidden Harm

Psychological
abuse of
older people



Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa
New Zealand Government



Te Tari Kaumātua
Office for Seniors

Psychological abuse can be spoken or unspoken. It aims to intimidate and control an older person.

It's Elder Abuse, and it's not OK.

The effects of psychological abuse

Psychological abuse causes mental stress – using fear of violence, isolation, and deprivation to create feelings of shame and powerlessness. It is easily hidden and can happen in public or behind closed doors.

So, it is important to know the signs to look for.



Signs someone is being abused

Someone experiencing psychological abuse may seem resigned or ashamed. They may appear depressed, tearful, confused, or feel helpless.

They may seem fearful without any explanation, have trouble sleeping, or be passive or uncharacteristically angry.

Control and isolation

Watch for controlling behaviour. Abusers will often be overbearing and prevent the older person from speaking.

They might insist that the older person is forgetful or that they have dementia. They often present the older person as a burden and talk about how hard it is to care for them.

It's common for abusers to isolate their victim by not letting them see family or friends and preventing access to services – like seeing their doctor.



Examples of abuse

Psychological or emotional abuse includes pressuring, intimidating, or bullying.

It involves name-calling, degradation, humiliation, or treating the older person like a child.

They may threaten the older person, their loved ones, or their pets. Others threaten to withdraw affection or control access to grandchildren or other loved ones. Or threaten to put the older person into a nursing home.

How you can help

If you're concerned about how someone is being treated, it's OK to help.

Call the Elder Abuse Response Service helpline for support:

0800 326 6865

If you think someone is in danger, call 111. Ask for the Police.



**ELDER ABUSE
IT'S NOT OK**

SPEAK OUT

0800 326 6865

support@elderabuse.nz | text: 5032