

CHCA Project ECHO Personal Care Providers

All Teach, All Learn

Building Skills, Knowledge, and Confidence



Observation to Action: Responding to Abuse and Neglect in Home Care Clients

Personal Care Providers may be the first to notice changes in a person's home, behaviour, safety, self-care, or relationship with others. This Learning Snapshot highlights key points from this CHCA TeleECHO session and summarizes Laura Tamblyn Watts' presentation on May 13, 2026. The intent is to support Personal Care Providers to observe, respectfully communicate and report in accordance to your provincial or territorial and organization's requirements.

Notice

Pay attention to patterns, changes, and signs that something may not be right.

Listen

Ask gentle, open questions when it is safe and appropriate to do so.

Report

Share concerns through your supervisor, care team, or required reporting pathway.

ABUSE AND NEGLECT CAN INCLUDE

- Abuse or neglect may involve an action or inaction that results in harm to an older person or vulnerable client.
- Types of abuse include physical, sexual, emotional or psychological, financial abuse or exploitation, neglect, self-neglect, denial of rights and freedoms, and inappropriate use or withholding of medication.
- Neglect may involve basic needs not being met, such as safe housing, food, medication, care, social connection, or personal supports.
- Self-neglect can look similar to neglect, but may reflect social disconnection, grief, depression, mental health concerns, financial issues, or difficulty managing necessities.

WARNING SIGNS TO OBSERVE

- Unexplained bruising, pain, limping, fractures, sprains, or injuries that are explained away as "just aging" or frequent falls.
- Changes in mood, withdrawal, fearfulness, distress, isolation, or behaviours that may reflect trauma rather than a "behaviour problem."
- Barriers to seeing or speaking with the client alone, such as a family member repeatedly saying the client is sleeping, unwell, unavailable, or unable to come to the phone.
- Missing or broken assistive devices, hearing aids, dentures, glasses, mobility supports, identification, health card, or other important documents.
- Unpaid bills, lack of money for basics, no fresh food, spoiled food, no incontinence products, poor mouth care, strong urine smell, bed sores, untreated infections, unsafe housing, pests, or animals not being cared for.
- New pressure to sign a will, power of attorney, representation agreement, bank document, or add someone to an account or property.

RESPONSE

- Do not confront or accuse the suspected abusive person. This may increase risk for the client.
- When it is safe, make time to listen. Use broad, gentle questions such as: "Is there anything making you feel uncomfortable?" or "Is there anything you wish was different?"
- Give the client time to answer. Avoid filling in the blanks or leading the person toward a specific response.
- Try to speak with the client alone and communicate in a way they can understand, including using interpretation support when needed and appropriate.
- Document and report concerns according to your workplace policy, supervisor direction, care team process, and local reporting requirements.
- If a client is in imminent danger, follow emergency procedures. If a person is being abused and is not mentally capable to make choices or protect themselves, police or the appropriate authority may need to be contacted.

Personal Care Providers are not expected to investigate or determine abuse. Their role is to notice concerns, listen respectfully when safe, document accurately, and report through the correct pathway so the client can be supported and protected.



Personal care providers are essential healthcare team members who deliver personal care and support to individuals receiving home care. This Project ECHO stream reinforces national standards and best practices and offers opportunities to learn new skills, gain knowledge from experts, and connect with peers in home care. This stream is designed to make learning easy, practical, and effective.