

Abuse in Later Life Wheel



Created by the National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life (NCALL), a project of the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence (WCADV)
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This diagram adapted from the Power and Control/Equality wheels developed by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, Duluth, MN

Abuse in Later Life Wheel Development

In early 1980, the Duluth Domestic Abuse Intervention Project asked women attending domestic violence educational groups to describe their experiences of being battered by their male partners. The Duluth Power and Control and Equity wheels were created using the most commonly repeated tactics. There are many additional abusive behaviors experienced by women that are not on the wheel due to the small space available.

In 1995, NCALL staff asked facilitators of older abused women's support groups to have participants review the Duluth wheel. These older women were asked if their experiences of abuse in later life were different or similar to younger victims/survivors. Participants from a handful of groups in Wisconsin, Minnesota and Illinois generously provided feedback. The older women's suggestions were used to create the Family Abuse in Later Life wheel by NCALL.

In 2005, NCALL took the Family Abuse in Later Life wheel back to older survivors, and asked them to review the wheel once again. Over 50 victims from eight states responded, many telling us that the wheel reflected the abuse in their lives, however, it did not adequately represent the ongoing psychological & emotional abuse they experienced throughout their relationships. The attached wheel illustrates this reality.

The outer rim of the wheel defines violence or the threat of violence that is evident in the relationship. The violence may be frequent or very limited, but fear and threats are present. The abuser uses threats to maintain power and control. Each of the pie pieces represent the different tactics abusers may use in a relationship. Abusers may not necessarily use all of the tactics or they may use one tactic more often. Any combination of tactics can be used to maintain power and control.

This wheel makes a distinction between emotional and psychological abuse. Emotional abuse is specific tactics, such as name-calling, put-downs, yelling and verbal attacks, used to demean the victim. Psychological abuse is the ongoing, manipulative, crazy making behavior that becomes an overriding factor/tactic in abusive relationships. Sometimes it can be very subtle, sometimes it is very intense and invasive.

The center represents the goal or the outcome of all of these behaviors...power and control.

Tactics Used by Abusers

PHYSICAL ABUSE

- Slaps, hits, punches
- Throws things
- Burns
- Chokes
- Breaks bones
- Creates Hazards
- Bumps and/or trips
- Forces unwanted physical activity
- Pinches, pulls hair & twists limbs
- Restrains

SEXUAL ABUSE

- Makes demeaning remarks about intimate body parts
- Is rough with intimate body parts during care giving
- Takes advantage of physical or mental illness to engage in sex
- Forces sex acts that make victim feel uncomfortable and/or against victim's wishes
- Forces victim to watch pornography on television and/or computer

PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE

- Withholds affection
- Engages in crazy-making behavior
- Publicly humiliates or behaves in a condescending manner

EMOTIONAL ABUSE

- Humiliates, demeans, ridicules
- Yells, insults, calls names
- Degrades, blames
- Uses silence or profanity

THREATENING

- Threatens to leave and never see elder again
- Threatens to divorce or not divorce
- Threatens to commit suicide
- Threatens to institutionalize
- Abuses or kills pet or prized livestock
- Destroys or takes property
- Displays or threatens with weapons

TARGETING VULNERABILITIES

- Takes or moves walker, wheelchair, glasses, dentures
- Takes advantage of confusion
- Makes victim miss medical appointments

NEGLECTING

- Denies or creates long waits for food, heat, care or medication
- Does not report medical problems
- Understands but fails to follow medical, therapy or safety recommendations
- Refuses to dress or dresses inappropriately

DENIES ACCESS TO SPIRITUAL TRADITIONS/EVENTS

- Denies access to ceremonial traditions or church
- Ignores religious traditions
- Prevents from practicing traditional ceremonies/events

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Tactics Used by Abusers

USING FAMILY MEMBERS

- Magnifies disagreements
- Misleads family members about extent and nature of illnesses/conditions
- Excludes or denies access to family
- Forces family to keep secrets
- Threatens and denies access to grandchildren
- Leaves grandchildren with grandparent without honoring grandparents needs and wishes

RIDICULES PERSONAL & CULTURAL VALUES

- Ridicules personal/cultural values
- Makes fun of a person's racial background, sexual preference or ethnic background
- Entices or forces to lie, commit a crime or do other acts that go against the victim's value system

ISOLATION

- Controls what victim does, whom they see, and where they go
- Limits time with friends and family
- Denies access to phone or mail
- Fails to visit or make contact

USING PRIVILEGE

- Treats victim like a servant
- Makes all major decisions
- Ignores needs, wants, desires
- Undervalues victim's life experience
- Takes advantage of community status, i.e. racial, sexual orientation, gender, economic

FINANCIAL EXPLOITATION

- Steals money, titles, or possessions
- Takes over accounts and bills and spending without permission
- Abuses a power of attorney
- Tells elder money is needed to repay drug dealer to stay safe

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