



## It's Not Right!

Neighbours, Friends & Families for Older Adults



Western  
Education

Centre for Research & Education  
on Violence Against Women & Children



## It's Not Right! Neighbours, Friends and Families for Older Adults

### *PEAM Educator Guide*

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**PEAM**  
PREVENT ELDER  
ABUSE MANITOBA

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## **It's Not Right! Neighbours, Friends and Families for Older Adults** ***PEAM Educator Guide***

### **Introduction**

The resources for *It's Not Right! Neighbours, Friends and Families for Older Adults* (INR-NFF) are intended to engage a wide variety of audiences in discussion and practice on how neighbours, friends and family members can learn to recognize and respond to warning signs of abuse and neglect in the lives of older adults they know. These are the bystanders to abusive situations who often know that something *isn't right* but often don't know what to do to help.

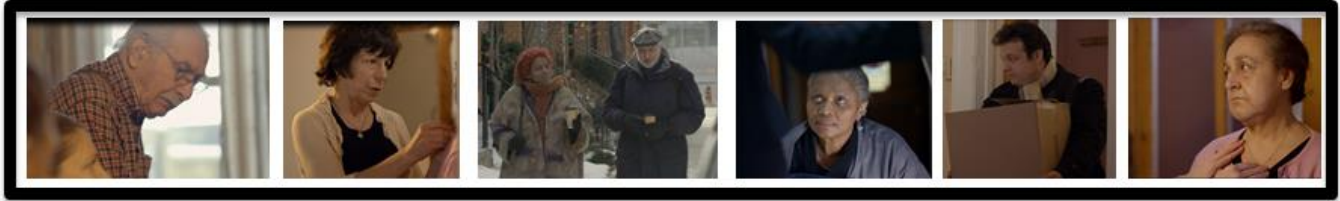
Research on bystander engagement has shown that with the right education and support, neighbours, friends and family members can become first responders who provide information about where to find help as well as critical support for friends and loved ones who may be experiencing abuse. Figuring out how to engage people from all walks of life and in all parts of the country so that they see themselves as having a vital role to play in creating a peaceful, respectful and supportive society is our shared goal for this program. The INR-NFF resources have had the benefit of input from professionals and passionate advocates from across the country and so represents our best collective thinking on the subject in Canada.

The guide has three main sections:

1. Overview of learning objectives, challenges and goals
2. Facilitating scenario discussions – discussion tips
3. Analysis of each scenario

Welcome to our great learning adventure! Your participation and contributions are needed and appreciated and will help us move toward ending abuse and neglect of older adults. Please stay in touch with us so that we can keep you informed as the project unfolds.





The PEAM team

## Section One: Overview

### What will presentation participants learn?

Participants will learn to:

- **Recognize** warning signs, risk factors
- **Recognize** ageist attitudes and behaviours
- **Respond** supportively, and with safety and respect
- **Refer** to local services and programs

### Handling Disclosures

Presentations often create the space where participants may disclose abuse, either while the session is happening or after it has ended. Occasionally a participant may realize for the first time in the session that they have been abused.

If the disclosure happens during your presentation, thank the person for sharing. You can say something like, *"I am sorry that has happened to you."* Suggest that you can speak to them more about it after the session. The concerns about disclosure happening during the session are for the person revealing too private information that they may regret later and/or that they will trigger another participant.

After the session remember that it is not your responsibility to 'solve' another person's life. You can listen and provide support by offering a contact number where the person can find help. You can encourage them to reach out for help, that they don't have to be alone, and that abuse happens to people from all walks of life. Don't be afraid to tell people that you are not an 'expert'.

### Facilitating Scenario Discussions - Challenges

The scenarios are designed to lift the lid for discussions to happen. PEAM educators should be prepared to address difficult issues that can surface in discussions with respect to ageist, racist, sexist or victim-blaming comments and also be alert to safety issues.



## Be Prepared

Listed below are some difficult issues that may arise in a presentation. You will find discussion tips in the next section for how to deal with them. PEAM educators should be prepared for situations when a participant:

- Disclosures of personal abuse or that experienced by another as above
- Monopolizes airtime
- Makes an ageist, racist, sexist (etc.) comment
- Blames the victim
- Voices an intervention that is solving the problem rather than responding with heart
- Voices an intervention that is unsafe
- Is argumentative, challenging of ideas or people in a disrespectful way

While these situations can be difficult, it is because the content tilts at such an important issue that is all about our shared attitudes and beliefs. PEAM educators just need to be prepared that challenging situations can happen – and know that your confidence to deal with them will grow. You don't have to be an expert. You don't have to be perfect. Learn from your experiences and share your learnings with the PEAM Team community.

Challenges are how we know something is happening. We want to disturb the status quo on abuse and neglect. We are pioneers who are learning and adapting as we go. Together, we are beginning to engage people in understanding and accepting that everyone has a role to play in creating a more peaceful society. We can all do better. INR-NFF is designed to provide opportunities that challenge us to question attitudes and beliefs that support isolation and tolerate abusive behaviour to instead foster compassion and courage. These are the long term goals we are working toward. Small steps will carry us a long way.

### Together we are wiser<sup>1</sup>

PEAM educators should also be prepared to be inspired and moved by the participants, stories and experiences that will take place. Amazing things happen when people are supported and have opportunity and encouragement to show that they care. Together, we are learning to be more and more effective at engaging bystanders, our neighbours, friends and family members. It all adds up to positive social change in small and large ways. We are committed to Changing the World with YOU Power. Thank you for being a part of the PEAM Team!



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<sup>1</sup> Margaret Wheatley





## Section 2: Facilitating Scenario Discussions

The overview of the scenarios in this section is intended to support you in leading discussions by providing an initial analysis of the scenes. Each of the scenarios provides an opportunity to increase public awareness and knowledge to:

- Recognize the warning signs and risk factors of abuse and neglect
- Recognize ageism and the many ways it contributes to abuse and neglect and how common it is in our attitudes and beliefs
- Recognize that power imbalances are involved in abusive relationships – there are different motivations to maintaining power over another person. It can be intentional or unintentional. Many of the scenarios are focused on situations where the person behaving abusively may not recognize that what they are doing is abusive.
- Recognize abusive behaviour as occurring on a continuum and that like ageism, it is also common in society. Without help, abusive situations will get worse.
- Recognize how common it is to blame the victim
- Recognize the complexity in relationships; we need to move away from labelling people as being either 'good' or 'bad'. We are all capable of abusive behaviour
- Respond with meaningful support that is respectful and helpful and SAFE!
- Recognize the need for both informal and formal supports
- Refer to professional services

### Discussion Tips

**JUST THE FACTS!** Remind participants during the discussion that when we are looking at warning signs, we want to focus on the facts. If we assume we know about the internal motivations of a character, we move into judgement of the situation. This will inevitably happen during a group discussion and can become a teachable moment. People will have different ideas about what actions 'mean' in the scenario. There is seldom a single shared perspective – everyone has different ideas about motivations and meaning. It is useful to point this out. Bring people back to the facts of the situation as the most useful information we want to work with.

**ADDRESS DISCRIMINATORY REMARKS:** There are opportunities to introduce the idea that ageism and abusive behaviour is common, and that we can agree to help each other recognize



when it shows up. Make a verbal agreement with the group that when comments show up in discussion that start with “those people” or “that culture” they are flags we will use to help us surface stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes and beliefs.

**RECOGNIZE VICTIM-BLAMING:** Observations or comments about the person suspected of experiencing abuse that include the words or phrases like “allows” or “lets it happen” when speaking about victims shows the way we blame victims for being in abusive relationships. It is never the victim’s fault that abuse is happening.

**CREATE A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR DISCUSSION:** Victim-blaming, racist, sexist, ageist comments will happen and need to be challenged in a non-aggressive way. This is no small task. Establish an agreement early in the session with participants to surface the ways that language can help point out the hard-to-see attitudes. Focus on the language, the actual words can be used, as a ‘clue’ to help us unearth our own widely shared biases. Emphasize that we all part of the same society, that we all contribute and that we have to help each other make change.

While we want to challenge blaming and discriminatory comments, we don’t want to shame the person making the comment such that people feel silenced. “Political correctness” is not our goal. Rather we want people to feel comfortable to voice opinion and then invite reflection. It is tricky and will involve trial and error to find the ways that work for you. Please share your learning.

It is also good to note that:

- Violence and abuse happen in all cultures and demographics, it is global
- It is easier to see problems in others, more difficult to see in ourselves – this is also something we share
- No religion condones violence or abuse
- Violence as a legitimate response to conflict and difference is accepted, widespread and long established.

## SAFETY IS A PRIORITY

Whether you are facilitating discussions or leading SNCit practice, safety is always the priority for everyone involved. Keep safety at the forefront by asking participants to talk about it throughout your event.



## Showing the Scenario:

- Set up the scenario before showing it and provide relevant background of the scene before viewing (relationship of the characters etc.)
- Ask participants to watch for warning signs and risk factors
  - Remind people that warning signs do not automatically mean that abuse is happening, warning signs should simply 'flag' our attention
- View the scenario

## Discussion with large group:

- Identify warning signs and risk factors – key learning
- Allow for general conversation / observations about the situations
- Note the different interpretations of the same situation – there is rarely a single unified perspective, and often very different interpretations. This is a key learning that demonstrates our sense of reality is based on interpretation. One can never be certain about meaning – this is why sticking to the facts when having a conversation is so important
- What tips the power balance toward abuse?
  - Identify ageist assumptions and other isms that lead to discrimination – key learning (relationship between abuse and ageism – other isms. The intersection of different issues that make situations complex and puts people at a disadvantage)
- What are the safety concerns?
- Is the situation any different if the gender of the older adult changes. How?
  - Allows for deeper discussion about gender differences in ageism and can add a layer of other isms – sexism, racism, etc.



## Viewing the Responses - Learning How to SNCit

The goals:

1. Reduce isolation to increase safety
2. Open the door for support using SNCit



Ask participants to watch for the impact on the character being spoken to and to identify specifically 'how' the speaking character opens or closes the door for support. How successful is the NFF character at 'being with' their friend or family member?

View the responses – if there are 2, the first is always the non-supportive response

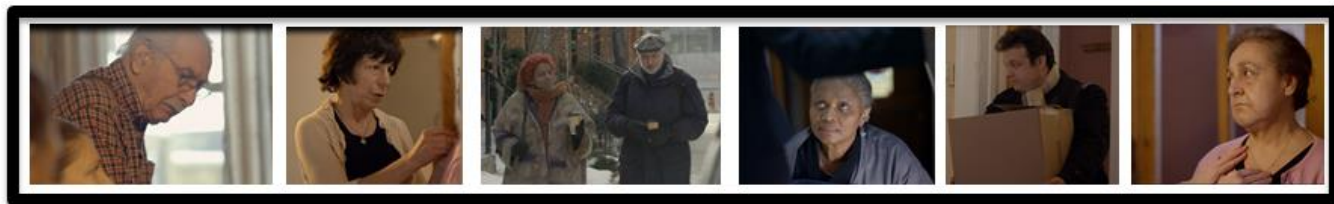




## Debrief

- What was the impact on the character being spoken to?
- Are the specific actions or words that 'open' or 'close' the door
  - Ask people to state the obvious
- Did the character 'handle' the conversation with safety and respect – what did they do?
- What did the character 'name' as the basis for the conversation?





## Section Three: Scenario Overviews

### Moving In

#### CAST

Mother (Carla) – Maria Vaccratsis

Son (Michael) – Carlos Diaz

Michael's daughter – Amerah Atiyeh

Friend (Francesca) – Jocelyn Zucco



Is there abuse happening? If so, what kind?

- Financial abuse. Using mother's bank card without her knowledge for his expenses – this is a crime. He has no legal authority to access her money, use her bank card, open her mail for purpose of seeking funds.
- Emotional abuse. Moving her without asking.
- Violation of Rights – opening her mail, moving her things downstairs

What is the abusive behaviour?

- Controlling behaviour
  - Disregard for the fact that it is Carla's house - not allowing Carla to freely make decisions and choices, imposing his preferences
  - Moving her downstairs
  - Disregard for her privacy
  - Reading her mail
- Michael has a strong sense of entitlement
- Treating Carla like a child – "mom – what are you doing?!"

Would Michael see himself as abusive?

- Michael would not likely see himself as an abuser – his mother may not as well. There is opportunity with the scenarios to shift the discussion from too easy judgments about Michael to acknowledge abuse is a social issue as well as an individual one. We want to move beyond 'us and them' discussions because people who are abusive are also our neighbours, friends and family members. There are many contributing and intersecting



factors that create abusive situations – they are always complex situations that can't be reduced down to 'bad' people. Abuse happens on a continuum and it is common in our society.

- Carla will defend Michael and tell you that he is not a 'bad' man. She wants him to be successful in life. Isn't that what everyone wants for their children?
- Michael is responsible for his actions no matter if they are unintentional or deliberate.
- Abuse and violence is common in our society. We have to learn to recognize abusive behaviour much earlier, both in ourselves and in other people. Research has shown us that if abusive behaviour is not interrupted in some way, it will get worse. This is one of the things we want to change – we want people to recognize abusive behaviour when it first starts to show up in relationships. Being able to name it as abuse is a big social change.

What are the risk factors?

- Michael is dependent upon Carla and he is unemployed
- They are living together
- He suffers from depression
- Alcohol abuse increases risk
- This is an escalating situation

What are the ageist attitudes that are implicit in this scene?

- Sense of entitlement on the part of the son and granddaughter – Carla is there to serve them / her assets are free to him
- Tension between treating Carla like a child – moving her things without asking, ignoring her concerns and Michael behaving like a dependent child
- Michael would likely not see himself as breaking the law, behaving abusively
- Ageism and sexism are both present - sexism in the sense that women have less rights and are assumed to 'serve' the family
- Carla's granddaughter also acts as if Carla is there to serve the family

Who has the power? What are the dynamics in the relationship that tilt it toward abuse?

- Michael has the power – he assumes his mother will 'mother' him in his time of need – he demands that – Carla's feelings don't matter
- He assumes that he can just use his mother's assets without asking – he feels entitled
- Carla's concern for Michael erodes her power in the relationship because Michael takes advantage of it



- Ageist assumptions that make Carla's rights and wishes less important than those of Michael

What is the harm?

- Michael is breaking the law by taking his mother's money, using her bankcard
- He is using up her resources
- He is modeling disrespect of Carla to his daughter
- He is undermining his relationship with his mother by treating her without regard for her wants and wishes as a person with equality
- Even if Michael is unaware that his behaviour is abusive, he is responsible for it

If you are Carla's friend, how might you support her?

- Recognize that she is concerned about her son
- Acknowledge the rapid changes that are taking place and ask how she feels about them
- Validate her rights
- Ask how you can help



Scenario Responses

- In the non-supportive response, Francesca is outraged by the situation and she is pushing Carla to take action in a way that shuts her down and blames her for the situation. This is victim-blaming. Carla will likely feel the need to defend her son. Chances are good that this will also hurt their relationship.
- In the supportive response Francesca allows her concern to lead the conversation without taking control about what needs to happen. Genuine concern is honest, powerful and can open the door for support. Francesca names the changing situation and expresses her concern. She sticks to the facts, "your life has changed so much". She is not judgmental or blaming. The choice about whether to talk about the situation is left to Carla. If Carla chooses to tell Francesca what is happening, Francesca can be prepared with information about where they might find help.

Other potential discussion areas:

- Use of bankcards / financial abuse – protective factors
- How to keep yourself safe – refer to INR brochure "What You Can Do To Keep Yourself Safe From Abuse"



## The Babysitter

### CAST

Mother (Dorothy) – Sandy Ross

Wife (Brittany) – Nicole St. Martin

Son (Albert) – Andrew Moody

Friend (Peter) – Kris Truelson



Is there abuse happening? If so, what kind?

- Emotional abuse – threatening to withhold access to her grandson, treating her wishes and feelings as unimportant
- Financial abuse – not paying for her time or offering to pay for her time

What is the abusive behaviour?

- Controlling behaviour
  - Dorothy is being coerced, threatened
  - Not allowing her the right to freely make decisions and choices
- Strong sense of entitlement – Her wishes are ignored, her time is not valued, and it is expected that she will give whatever support is required without thought for herself.
- Treating her like a child – in the sense of 'do what we say'

What are the risk factors?

- The couple seems to be dependent on her

What are the ageist attitudes that are explicit and implicit in this scene?

- Dorothy is retired and so is always available
- She doesn't need to be compensated because she has her own money
- Her time is not as important, her wishes are not important
- The ageist attitudes justify the behaviour – the couple would not see themselves as being abusive

What are the intersecting issues?

- Sexism is present - in the sense that women have less rights and are assumed to 'serve' the family
- Racism may also be a factor. The daughter-in-law appears to be treating her mother-in-law like a servant



- Institutional issues - social policies set agendas – if formal childcare not available the burden is transferred to other vulnerable people, often grandmothers
- Economy – two incomes needed to run the household

Who has the power? What are the dynamics in the relationship that tilt it toward abuse?

- It's two against one
- Brittany threatens to cut off her relationship with her grandchild
- The young couple is behaving as if her life is for their convenience
- Social policies set agendas – if formal childcare not available the burden on families often falls to grandmothers

What is the harm?

- Dorothy is not free to say “no” without jeopardizing the relationship
- The relationship with Albert and Brittany will be harmed because they don't ask her, there is no attempt to reach a mutual solution
- She has little opportunity to contribute to the family on her own terms
- Sets the stage for social exclusion by isolating her from her friends and regular activities

If you are her friend, how might you support Dorothy?

- See the struggle she is experiencing
- Validate her right to make choices
- Validate her right to have a relationship with her grandson
- Ask how you can support her
- It may be hard for her to talk about what is happening
- Let her know you are available to listen



Scenario Response (one response)

- Peter is worried about Dorothy. Notice that he begins his conversation by making light of the situation. It will not 'open the door' as Dorothy easily brushes it off. Peter adjusts to try again. He taps into his real concern and communicates that honestly to her. He touches her arm. He asks a question.



## The Family Table

### CAST

Father (Harold) – Paul Soles

Son – David Gale

Daughter looking at bills – Diane Flacks

Daughter at end of table – Gail Kerble

Friend (Richard) – Robert Levine



Is there abuse happening? If so, what kind?

- Emotional abuse – making plans to sell Harold's house without his involvement or regard for his wishes / rights violations in going through his personal papers

What is the abusive behaviour?

- Controlling behaviour
  - Not allowing Harold to make decisions and choices
- Treating him like a child / the sibling's behaviour could be described as infantilization / paternalism. The only time they pay attention is when he knocks over the purse, which is an over-reaction to a small incident.

What are the risk factors?

- Loss of Harold's autonomy increases his vulnerability

What are the ageist attitudes that are implicit in this scene?

- Expectation re the burden of having an aging parent, of having to care for him
- No sense that his family sees that Harold makes a contribution to the conversation
- The ageist attitudes justify the behaviour – the siblings would not see themselves as behaving abusively

Who has the power? What are the dynamics in the relationship that tilt it toward abuse?

- Three against one
- The adult children are aligned and overpowering their dad
- It is unlikely they would see their behaviour as abusive, ageist
- They are 'problem-solving' and have set clear goals – sell the house, find a retirement home, place him there
- Harold's feelings are unimportant in the face of the task at hand

What is the harm?



- Harold's wishes are not known or sought – he doesn't matter in the decision-making
- The message to him is that he is 'a problem' – is hurtful, disrespectful, destructive to the relationship
- He is going to be forced into a living situation he may not want or be ready for
- The shift from being a valued member of society to a being a burden will take a personal toll

If you are Harold's friend, how might you support him?

- See the struggle he is experiencing
- Validate his desire to keep the house
- Understand that these are his children and that any indictment of their behaviour may seem like a betrayal
- Ask how you can help
- Let him know you are available to listen



#### Scenario Responses

- The non-supportive response is more about Richard's anger than Harold's experience of the loss of his rights. Richard's comments may increase the Harold's sense of isolation through the judgment about the kids and the challenge that he needs to stand up to them.
- In the supportive response, Richard does not criticize Harold's children; he gives them the benefit of the doubt and then names Harold's mental capacity as a strength.
- Possible discussion – what are the differences for men and women as they become less independent? Is there an assumption that 'dad' can't take care of himself.





Notes:

