

J. PROTECTION OF ADULTS AT RISK OF HARM – ENGLAND

Adult at risk

An adult at risk is someone aged 18 or over who is, or may be, in need of community services due to age, illness or a mental or physical disability. They may have suffered a bereavement or struggling with the impact of past abuse or trauma. They are, or may be, unable to take care of themselves, or unable to protect themselves against significant harm or exploitation.

Where it is known or suspected that an 'adult at risk' is being harmed, it must be decided whether or not further action is needed to protect the adult's well-being, property or financial affairs. Harm could occur at the hands of anyone: a relative, spouse or partner, friend, professional, neighbour or stranger. It could happen anywhere – in the family home, in a care setting, at work or in public places. More specific details on safeguarding adults can be found under Chapter 14 of the Department of Health Care Act 2014 guidance².

Who is an adult at risk of harm?

Statutory guidance states that safeguarding duties apply to an adult who:

- has needs for care and support (whether or not the local authority is meeting any of those needs); and
- is experiencing, or at risk of, abuse or neglect; and
- as a result of those care and support needs is unable to protect themselves from either the risk of, or the experience of, abuse or neglect.

'Safeguarding means protecting an adult's right to live in safety, free from abuse and neglect. It is about people and organisations working together to prevent and stop both the risks and experience of abuse or neglect ... We must also recognise that adults sometimes have complex interpersonal relationships and may be ambivalent, unclear or unrealistic about their personal circumstances'.³ Safeguarding is promoting their well-being, allowing them to make their own choices as far as they are able.

What are abuse and neglect?

What constitutes abuse or neglect can take many forms and circumstances but exploitation, in particular, is a common theme. The categories below are not an exhaustive list but an illustrative guide as to the sorts of behaviours which could give rise to a safeguarding concern. Incidents of abuse may be one-off or multiple, and affect one or more persons.

- physical violence
- domestic abuse
- sexual abuse
- psychological abuse
- financial and material abuse
- modern slavery
- discriminatory abuse
- organisational abuse
- neglect and acts of omission
- self-neglect

It is most likely that the person responsible for abuse is known to the adult and is in a position of trust and power. Abuse can happen anywhere: for example, in someone's own home, when an adult lives alone or with

²[Care and Support Statutory Guidance \(2023\)](#)

³[Ibid.](#)

others, in a care home or other professional setting. Sadly, it can take place in church. Abuse or neglect may be unintentional and may arise from an individual struggling to care for a loved one, or it may arise from a person's deliberate intent to cause harm or exploitation.