

National Safeguarding Adults Week 2020

Organisational Abuse



The term “institutional abuse” refers to neglect and poor care practice within an institution or specific care setting.

Institutional Abuse Definition

In the Care Act defines institutional abuse (or “organisational abuse”) as one of the 10 types of harm. It includes neglect and poor care practice within a specific care setting. This could be a hospital or a care home, but also the care you receive in your own home.

Examples of Organisational Abuse

Organisational abuse doesn’t have to involve physical violence. It can be something as small as insisting that a person in care must drink their tea at the same time every day.

This is the sort of thing that many of us take for granted. But when the right to choose is taken away, it can count as abuse.

The abuse can either be a one-off incident or [an ongoing culture of ill-treatment](#). The abuse can take many forms, including neglect, and poor professional practices as a result of the structure, policies, processes and practices in an organisation.

Here are some forms the abuse might take:

- Inappropriate use of power or control.
- Inappropriate confinement, restraint, or restriction.
- Lack of choice – in food, in decoration, in lighting and heating, and in other environmental aspects.

- Lack of personal clothing or possessions.
- No flexibility of schedule, particularly with bed times.
- Financial abuse.
- Physical or verbal abuse.

Remember that this list is by no means exhaustive. So it's important to be aware of the signs of institutional abuse.

Signs of Organisational Abuse

These are the sort of things that may indicate that organisational abuse is happening:

- An unsafe, unhygienic or overcrowded environment.
- A strict or inflexible routine.
- Lack of privacy, dignity, and respect for people as individuals.
- Withdrawing people from community or family contacts.
- No choice offered with food, drink, dress or activities.
- No respect or provisions for religion, belief, or cultural backgrounds.
- Treating adults like children, including arbitrary decision-making.

Also be on the lookout for more telling signs of abuse, including cuts, bruises, and restraint. Another big warning sign is an organisation that discourages visits, or the involvement of friends and relatives.

Why Does Organisational Abuse Happen?

Like all types of abuse, there is no single cause of organisational abuse. It generally happens in institutions where staff are:

- Poorly trained.
- Poorly supervised.
- Unsupported by management, or otherwise unaccountable.
- Bad at communicating.

Organisational abuse can involve more than one abuser. Though a culture that doesn't recognise or respond to the actions of a lone abuser can be just as harmful to the adult at risk.

So What Should You Do If You Think Organisational Abuse Is Happening?

Do you think institutional abuse is happening in a place near you? If the organisational abuse involves children, look up your local children's social care referral point from your local safeguarding partnership's child protection procedures.

If the organisational abuse involves adults, there are numerous people you can contact. [The Care Quality Commission](#) (CQC) will be able to advise you on the best course of action to take. Even if you're not completely sure that abuse is happening, it's still worth letting people know. It's better to be wrong than to let the abuse continue.

What If the Abuse is Happening at an Institute You Work At?

The CQC has resources for reporting concerns as a member of staff. You can [Access them here](#). Also take a look at our [guide](#) to why your organisation needs a safeguarding adult's policy and procedures document.