



A project of the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence



## Supplement to #1Thing Action Guide

### Supporting Older Survivors of Abuse

By [National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life \(NCALL\)](#)

Domestic violence is synonymous with [intimate partner violence](#) (married, child in common, dating etc.) and by its structure, includes some sort of current or former intimate relationship. Older adults, however, may experience abuse from intimate partners, their adult children, grandchildren, other family members, or caregivers.

Research suggests that one in ten older adults experiences one or more forms of violence, such as abuse (emotional, physical, sexual, and financial), neglect, or exploitation.<sup>1</sup> As 10,000 baby boomers turn 65 every day in the United States<sup>2</sup>, we must meet the needs of older victims of domestic violence, sexual abuse, and stalking. Abuse in later life victims may benefit from services offered by domestic violence and sexual assault programs, such as crisis lines, emergency shelter, transitional housing, support groups, peer support, and legal and economic advocacy. Free and confidential services that include victim-defined advocacy, safety planning, trauma-informed, and culturally-relevant responses may not be available from other service providers.

Domestic violence and sexual assault programs have not customarily served many victims age 50 and older. Typically, staff working in domestic violence or sexual assault programs have more experience working with younger populations than older individuals. Therefore, some existing policies have unintended ageist consequences that deny or

**Elder abuse** is the “physical, sexual, or psychological abuse, neglect, abandonment, and financial exploitation of an older person by another person or entity, that occurs in any setting, either in a relationship where there is an expectation of trust and/or when an older person is targeted based on age or disability.”

Connolly, M. T., Brandl, B., & Brekman, R. (2014). Elder Justice Roadmap Report. Washington, DC: US Department of Justice, p. 3. Retrieved from [http://ncea.acl.gov/library/gov\\_report/docs/ejrp\\_roadmap.pdf](http://ncea.acl.gov/library/gov_report/docs/ejrp_roadmap.pdf)

**Abuse in later life** describes the intersection of domestic violence, sexual abuse, and elder abuse. NCALL defines abuse in later life as the willful abuse, neglect, or financial exploitation of an older adult who is age 50+ that is perpetrated by someone in an ongoing relationship (e.g., spouse, partner, family member, or caregiver) with the victim as well as sexual abuse by any offender,



<sup>1</sup> Acierno, R., Hernandez, M. A., Amstadter, A. B., Resnick, H. S., Steve, K., Muzzy, W., & Kilpatrick, D. G. (2010). Prevalence and correlates of emotional, physical, sexual, and financial abuse and potential neglect in the United States: The National Elder Mistreatment Study. *American Journal of Public Health*, 100(2), 292-297.

<sup>2</sup> Bernard, D. (2012). The Baby Boomer Number Game. Retrieved from <http://money.usnews.com/money/blogs/on-retirement/2012/03/23/the-baby-boomer-number-game>

limit services for some older victims from various backgrounds.

Notwithstanding these challenges, advocates and programs can have a profound and positive influence in the lives of older survivors. Advocates can use their specialized skills and training and their confidential relationship with survivors to help them better understand the dynamics of abuse; to be aware of the available options, services, and resources; and to assist them as they navigate through complex intervening systems. Advocates and programs can also help to combat ageist social norms by promoting dignity and respect for persons of all ages in their work and service programs.

Following are some guidelines and practice strategies, excerpted from the National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life's (NCALL) [Working with Older Survivors of Abuse: A Framework for Advocates](#), for creating or enhancing policies and services to address violence and harm across the lifespan.

- **Promote responsive [victim-defined advocacy](#) that respects the values, life experience, and culture of an older survivor.**
  - Utilize approaches that address the impact of multiple traumatic events including [historical trauma](#).
  - Recognize that older victims may have generational experiences and values that differ from younger advocates. Provide training and information for staff about potential different generational values and communication styles.
  - Utilize an intersectional approach that takes into full account an older adults' overlapping identities and life experiences.
- **[Ensure input from older adults](#) from diverse backgrounds in program planning and policy work.**
  - Involve older adults from diverse backgrounds in creating, reviewing, and implementing programs and policies to better understand the impact on older survivors.
- **Ensure services, safety planning strategies, and outreach plans meet the needs of older victims.**
  - [Tailor direct and supportive services](#) to address the unique needs of older victims from various backgrounds.
  - Utilize [safety planning](#) strategies that are both age appropriate and age-relevant (ie. consider implications of mandatory reporting, power of attorney, healthcare needs, financial needs, etc.).
  - Create and disseminate [outreach materials](#) that depict older adults and include abuse across the lifespan.
- **Create new and enhance existing [policies](#) to address violence and harm across the lifespan.**
  - Implement policies that reflect the needs that arise from abuse across the survivor lifespan.
  - Adopt [eligibility guidelines](#) that include older victims who have been or are being abused by someone they trust, love, or rely on.
  - Ensure that existing policies respect the confidentiality, privacy, and autonomy of older victims while addressing [mandatory reporting](#).
- **Provide equitable services that are welcoming and accessible.**

- Create a [welcoming and inclusive atmosphere](#) for older victims from diverse backgrounds.
- Ensure that barriers that limit access for persons with [mobility](#) and [communication](#) issues are addressed.
- **Work with allies and other organizations to improve responses to older victims.**
  - Learn more about options for older victims and organizations that might provide assistance.
  - Work [collaboratively](#) with other professionals to improve the responses of various systems.
- **Raise awareness through education and social justice activities.**
  - Provide ongoing [training](#) for DV/SA advocates and volunteers using various teaching methods to staff, board members, and volunteers.
  - Conduct interactive [training for other professionals and volunteers](#).
  - Increase [public awareness](#) of abuse in later life and resources.
  - [Lift up the voices of older survivors](#). Always be sure to consider safety and confidentiality concerns of older survivors first before asking them to share their stories.
  - Confront ageism and social norms that support abuse in later life by promoting dignity and respect for people of all ages.

Which practice can be your [#1Thing?](#)

## Sample Social Media Posts

### Twitter

- Lift up older survivors' stories throughout the year by inviting them to speak at an awareness events including Stalking Awareness Month (January), Sexual Assault Awareness Month (April), World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (June 15), and Domestic Violence Awareness Month (October). #DVAM2019 #1Thing
- #1Thing you can do is engage the voices of older survivors when working on legislation to enhance protections for victims of elder abuse, stalking, sexual assault, and domestic violence. #DVAM2019
- #1Thing you can do to raise awareness of #DVinlaterlife is to share outreach materials including older adults. #DVAM2019 <http://ow.ly/LUU450vDrLv>
- Confront ageism and social norms that support #DVinlaterlife by promoting dignity and respect for people of all ages. #DVAM2019 #1Thing
- #1Thing you can do is learn more about options for older survivors & the organizations that may provide support and services. <https://www.ncall.us/for-professionals/> #DVAM2019
- #1Thing victim service providers can do is consider how to develop equitable and inclusive programming for the quickly growing and diverse older adult population. #DVAM2019

- Building equitable partnerships between mainstream and culturally specific programming is #1Thing you can do when providing victim-centered support to older survivors. Learn more: <http://bit.ly/2wHXOEO> #DVAM2019
- Building multi-generational, multi-racial partnerships is #1Thing you can do to support older survivors in your community. #1Thing #DVAM2019
- Learn about the barriers systems reinforce that keep older survivors from getting the support they need and deserve. Review practices & policies to better meet their needs and increase access to services. <http://bit.ly/2lISEDa> #1Thing #DVAM2019
- #LGBTQ+ older adults face unique barriers which can directly impact their ability to reach out for assistance.
- Older adults do not live single-issue lives. Intersectional approaches recognize the overlapping identities and experiences of older survivors. #1Thing #DVAM2019
- Respecting older adults requires us to examine and challenge our own ageist attitudes and biases in ourselves, our agencies, our communities and systems. #1Thing #DVAM2019
- Ensure that existing policies respect the confidentiality, privacy, and autonomy of older victims while addressing mandatory reporting. #1Thing #DVAM2019
- Implement policies that reflect abuse across the lifespan. #1Thing #DVAM2019
- Promote responsive victim-defined advocacy that respects the values, life experience, and culture of an older survivor. #1Thing #DVAM2019
- Practicing victim-defined advocacy and respectful communication is #1Thing you can do when working with older survivors. #DVAM2019
- When working with older survivors, #1Thing you can do is utilize remedies that address the impact of multiple traumatic events including historical trauma. #DVAM2019
- #1Thing you can do is learn about unique issues and challenges for older victims abused by intimate partners. <http://ow.ly/JcDB50vWuHw> #DVAM2019
- What's #1Thing you or your organization can do to support a survivor of intimate partner violence in later life? #DVAM2019
- This Domestic Violence Awareness Month Challenge your and others ageist assumptions. #1Thing #DVAM2019

## Facebook

- Engaging in mobile advocacy is #1Thing you can do to meet the needs of older survivors of abuse. Have flexible policies about where to meet older survivors--in their homes, or public places. #DVAM2019
- No matter the age of the survivor, service providers should maintain a victim-centered approach when planning services. #1Thing advocates can do is explore options with older survivors, to help them identify and remove obstacles, and to honor and support their decisions, taking into account age-related generational and cultural values. #DVAM2019
- Some agency policies have unintended ageist consequences that deny or limit services for some older victims from various backgrounds. Some older adults who are harmed by their adult children, grandchildren, other family members, or caregivers would not qualify

to receive services from a domestic violence program that is funded only to serve victims of intimate partner violence. #1Thing DV programs can do is create new or enhance existing policies to address violence and harm across the lifespan. #DVAM2019

- #1Thing DV programs can do is create a welcoming and inclusive environment for older victims. Display pictures and posters that include images of older adults from various backgrounds. Offer books, movies, and social activities of interest to individuals of all ages and generations. Representation matters. #DVAM2019
- The quickly growing older adult population is more diverse than ever before. #1Thing victim services providers must consider is how to develop programming for all older adults based on their specific needs that respect their cultural, racial, and LGBTQ+ identity. Learn more about aging population demographics by visiting: <http://bit.ly/2Ks0Ghh>. #DVAM2019
- Tribal communities have unique needs and considerations when designing effective responses to abuse and mistreatment. #1Thing you can do is find out how one-size-fits-all approaches to working with older victims may not work for every community. Tribal elders who experience harm in tribal communities have unique lived experiences. To learn more about the issue of abuse in this unique cultural context, read Reclaiming What is Sacred: Addressing Harm to Indigenous Elders and Developing a Tribal Response to Abuse in Later Life. <http://bit.ly/2L503tA> #DVAM2019
- #LGBTQ+ older adults face unique barriers which can directly impact their ability to reach out for assistance. #1Thing victim service programs can do is review their organization's policies and practices to assure they are providing inclusive and welcoming services to victims who are a part of the LGBTQ+ community. Click the link to learn more about how to develop inclusive services for LGBTQ+ older adults: <http://ow.ly/ASle50vWuPn> #DVAM2019
- Systemic, institutional, and historical oppressions and related trauma can have a cumulative and detrimental impact on the ability of older victims from marginalized communities to access services that are culturally responsive. #1Thing Systems and service providers can do is work to ensure the supports they provide are culturally-affirming and address the unique and complex challenges each individual older victim faces. Commit to learning more and check out resources from our friends at @WOCNetwork and @casadeesperanza. #DVAM2019
- #1Thing professionals working with older adults can do is be mindful of the role that ageism plays in how older individuals may be perceived and treated when they experience abuse. Ageist notions about an older adult's capacity to comprehend abuse, to make informed determinations about what to do, and about their values related to abuse can all thwart efforts to support an older victim. Understanding ageism and avoiding judgment around an older adult's choices are critical components of providing effective supports. #DVAM2019