



Supporting people with dementia to be involved in adult safeguarding enquiries

Research has shown that older adults with dementia are more likely to experience abuse and neglect than those without a diagnosis. People who are living with dementia are entitled to be free from abuse and neglect and where abuse is experienced, and action should be taken to stop and prevent it.

The Social Services and Wellbeing Act 2014 provides Local Authorities with a duty to safeguard adults. However, the needs of people with dementia will vary widely and in order to safeguard people with dementia effectively, practitioners need to be able to adapt their practice. Building on the work undertaken by the University of Bath, the North Wales Safeguarding Adults Board have produced this short good practice tips:

Practice tip – Provide information about safeguarding

Many Local Authorities provide information and posters which set out what abuse is and how people can report it. This type of information should be routinely used to highlight the nature of safeguarding to the public. The information should describe what safeguarding is, the types of abuse and neglect that people might experience and how individuals can report abuse. It should also identify local advocacy services and how people can access them.

Practice tip – thinking about the person's communication needs

It is important to start by assessing the difficulties that an individual experiences and what kinds of help they may find useful. In many cases, the person themselves will be able to say how they find it most useful to receive information. However, information should also be gained from other people who knows the person well, such as family carers, key workers, social workers or health care professionals. It is also important to remember that people living with dementia may have other physical disabilities and that these too may have an impact on their ability to understand.

Practice tip – Think about what is important to the person

In order that practitioners can promote a person's wellbeing throughout any safeguarding processes, they need to identify what is important to and for the person in question

Practice tip – Think about where the conversation is held

Safeguarding enquiries involve talking to people about abuse and neglect. This is a sensitive issue and so thought needs to be given about where conversations take place. People who are living with dementia may become confused when going into new environments for the first time. Several people living with dementia in the consultation said that they would prefer to be interviewed in a place that they were familiar with, such as at a memory café that they attend. A space should be found where a confidential discussion can take place without others over-hearing.

Be mindful of where the alleged abuse or neglect has taken place. Where possible, try and interview the person away from that place. For example, if there is an allegation that a care home resident has experienced abuse in her bedroom, it may be helpful to interview her in another area of the home. It may also be useful to interview the person in a quiet area, so that it is easy for them to focus on and follow the conversation.

The ability of people living with dementia to engage in safeguarding decisions is likely to vary widely. Some people will be fully able to engage in decision-making with little or no support. Others will benefit from having advocates with them or from using decision aids. Some people may have become less practised at making decisions due to having fewer opportunities in their day to day lives, which may have led to a loss of confidence.

Practice tip – Consider advocacy

Advocacy refers to a process in which an individual is supported by another person to make their wishes known. People living with dementia who took part in the consultation said that they would find it easier to take part in a safeguarding decision if they had someone with them that they knew well. Some people said that they would like to speak for themselves but would find the presence of someone they knew well reassuring

Practice tip – Consider how meetings or discussions are recorded

People living with dementia who took part in the consultation said that they often found it difficult to remember decisions that they had made. People living with dementia identified that in cases where an abuser did not have access to their information, they would like a copy of a safeguarding decision in writing so that they could refer to it later.

Individuals identified several things which they found helpful. For example, one woman said,

“I would like a little postcard that I can put on the fridge with all my other things [telling me what had been decided]. I know it would be safe and sound there”.

Practice tip – Reviewing Practice

The Wales Safeguarding Personal approach encourages Safeguarding Adults Boards and individual practitioners to identify what the person central to the safeguarding process wants. It also encourages them to record what the views of that person in order that the outcomes from safeguarding work can be reviewed.