

National Ageing Research Institute

PHYSICAL ABUSE

#OKorNotOK

Film plot overview:

72-year-old Mulchand, of Indian background, lives with dementia. The dementia has caused personality changes for Mulchand, who has gone from being a loving husband to a sometimes-violent man, who can be both verbally and physically abusive towards his wife of 52 years, 70-year-old Reshma. He is also verbally abusive with hospital staff when he is admitted for a chest infection. June, a hospital social worker expresses her concern for Reshma's safety.

Follow the link below to view the film:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3xcvRRL_Su0&feature=youtu.be

PHYSICAL ABUSE

Sometimes families find themselves in difficult circumstances, and it's hard to know what's okay and what's not okay. Physical abuse is one form of elder abuse, and it may or may not be intentional or easy to recognise. People with dementia can have changed behaviours. Physical abuse is very rare, but even in these circumstances, carers may want to keep caring. They may find it difficult to talk about the abuse and worry what will happen to their loved one living with dementia.

If you suspect someone is a victim of physical abuse, or if they ask for help:

1. Talk to your supervisor

- Be sure to take notes of any concerns you have, so you can be accurate
- Victims may be fearful, so understanding their story as completely as possible is important.

2. Develop a safety plan with the victim

- Remember victims are at real risk. The safety plan may include calling 000 in an emergency and having contact details of neighbours who could come to the house or offer support.

3. Investigate how both parties can be better supported

- This can include a referral for the victim to carer support, and for the person who is physically violent, to a psychogeriatric team to help with behavioural assessment and a medication review
- An ACAT visit can be arranged to assess the needs of the person who has become violent at home.

4. Organise a family meeting

- The family may consider options such as counseling, while services such as respite can also be discussed
- Sometimes family members aren't aware of what is happening and this is a good time to discuss what informal and formal support is available
- Education on safety is important. Many people try to care for their loved one as long as they can, but abuse is never okay.

If you need more information or would like to speak to someone about someone you care for, please call the Elder Abuse Hotline: 1800 Elder Help (1800 353 374).

This number will direct you to the relevant service in your state