

## Older people have the right to decide how they use their money

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### Information about **ELDER FINANCIAL ABUSE**

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Man who ripped off grandma  
'betrayed fundamental trust'  
*NZ Herald*

Couple 'divorce' son over \$20,000  
ripoff *Sunday News*

A Tahunanui woman who milked her ill  
grandmother's estate of thousands of  
dollars over four years,  
including money set aside  
for a funeral, has been jailed  
for 18 months.  
*Nelson Mail*

A Stratford woman befriended her  
90-year-old neighbour and systematically  
milked her bank and credit card  
accounts of \$127,000 over four years.  
*Taranaki Daily News*

### **What these people did was a crime.**

**They took advantage of the older people in their lives.**

**They thought it was OK to take the older person's money**

**– that they needed it more than the older person.**

**But we all know that's just not true.**

### **What is elder financial abuse?**

Elder financial abuse is the illegal or improper use of an older person's money or property by a relative or other person in a position of trust.

Every day, Age Concern elder abuse and neglect prevention services receive, on average, five new calls for help. Calls about older people who may be being abused or neglected.

Of the cases we investigate, up to 50% involve financial abuse, often including psychological abuse.

### **Who abuses?**

Most abusers are members of the older person's family/whānau.

Other people in close, personal or professional relationships with an older person may also abuse – friends or neighbours, paid carers, people who work in rest homes, lawyers and people working in the finance industry.

Sometimes the person with Enduring Power of Attorney for an older person is abusing this responsibility.

## What happens to older people when they are financially abused?

Financial abuse can deprive older people of their life savings and assets. They have few opportunities to recoup these losses, which may lead to longstanding poverty and ill health. Financial abuse damages family relationships.

It causes great distress to older people.

*The personal losses associated with abuse can be devastating and include the loss of independence, homes, lifesavings, health, dignity, and security.*

- National Committee for the Prevention of Elder Abuse  
[www.preventelderabuse.org](http://www.preventelderabuse.org)

## How can I tell if someone is being financially abused?

Every situation is different, but there are some common signs of financial abuse. Here are some changes you might notice in an older person.

- Anxiety about spending any money
- Not having enough money for necessities or to pay bills
- Unexplained withdrawals from bank accounts
- Disappearance of possessions
- Unexpected changes to Enduring Powers of Attorney
- Uncharacteristic withdrawn behaviour or dishevelled appearance
- Missed appointments
- Signs of intimidation or threats

Family members or others close to the older person may appear to be exerting influence over the older person's decisions or making false promises. They may show excessive interest in the older person's assets, be controlling of the older person, and reluctant to leave their side during appointments or conversations.



**“Speak up if you suspect financial abuse”**

– Dame Lois Muir OBE

## If you suspect that an older person is being abused or neglected...

Don't let your fear of meddling in someone else's business stop you from speaking out.

Talk to the older person – let them know you care and are worried for them. Encouragement and support is a really important way you can help an older person to take action when they are being mistreated.

Do not put the older person at risk by confronting the abuser yourself unless the older person asked you to and you have a plan to keep them safe.

## Where can I get help?

Specialist elder abuse and neglect prevention services operate in many major cities and provincial areas throughout New Zealand. The phone numbers are listed on the back page.

Services provide information and advice; they work with older people, their families/whānau and carers supporting them to change the situation so they can all be safer.

**People who are financially abused are often also psychologically abused –**

**“If you don’t give me money for booze I won’t get your angina pills from the chemist.”**

**“Please say you’ll guarantee my mortgage. Don’t you love me any more?”**

**“I’m taking this blimmin’ cat to the vet to be put down. Wish I could do the same to you. If you can’t afford to give me money for the pokies, you can’t afford cat food either.”**

## **Have you ever been tempted...**

Sometimes financial abuse develops gradually over time, without deliberate intent.

Like being caught short when doing Aunty’s shopping – “I’ll just borrow \$10 for the kids’ lunch money and pay her back when I do her shopping next week.”

But then you forget.

And next time you realise you need some money for Emma’s sports pants, and then it’s to pay the school fees, or David’s haircut, and before you know it, you’re helping yourself to \$50 every week.

This is abuse of the older person.

## **Take our self-check**

**If you find yourself –**

- taking a little bit of extra money for yourself...
- ‘borrowing’ family valuables for ‘safe-keeping’...
- telling an older person they don’t need that car / haircut / dress they want...
- visiting Nan only on pension day, because you know the fridge will be full and you can get yourself a good feed...
- constantly asking your Dad about his will, pressuring him to leave more to you and less to others...
- running up toll calls on Uncle’s phone...
- getting fed up with all the time you are spending managing your parents’ finances and starting to make decisions you know they won’t agree with...
- thinking about not paying Mum and Dad back the loan they gave you....
- asking your home support client to help out with your child’s dental fees...

**– it’s time to have a think.**

## **Next steps**

Remember that older people have the right to make their own decisions about how they spend their money...

... even if we don’t agree with their choices.

... even if it means we have to get a loan from the bank instead of from them.

... even if it means there’ll be nothing left for us when they die.

Everyone deserves to be treated with respect and with caring.

Put yourself in the older person’s shoes – they trust you. How would you feel if someone you trusted was doing this to you?

***“There is pain on the realisation that the one you gave birth to is now taking something you really need.”***

## **Help is available**

Talk to someone – call an elder abuse and neglect prevention service – phone numbers are on the back of this sheet.

Older people have the right to decide what they do with their money.

You can stop elder abuse now.

# Elder abuse and neglect prevention services

## Contact phone numbers for specialist elder abuse and neglect prevention services

### North

### Telephone

Age Concern Whangarei .....	0-9-438 8043
Age Concern Rodney .....	0-9-426 0916
Age Concern North Shore .....	0-9-489 4975
Age Concern Auckland .....	0-9-820 0184
Age Concern Counties/Manukau .....	0-9-279 4331
Te Oranga Kaumātua Kuia Disability Support Services Trust ..	0-9-268 0174
TOA Pacific .....	0-9-276 4596

### Midland

Age Concern Hamilton .....	0-7-838 2266
Age Concern Tauranga .....	0-7-578 2631
Gisborne - Age Concern Tairāwhiti .....	0-6-867 6533
Age Concern Taupo .....	0-7-378 1199
Age Concern Hastings .....	0-6-870 9060
New Plymouth - Te Hauora Pou Heretanga .....	0-6-759 7303

### Central

Age Concern Wanganui .....	0-6-345 1799
Palmerston North - Age Concern Manawatu .....	0-6-355 2832
Age Concern Horowhenua .....	0-6-367 2181
Age Concern Kapiti Coast .....	0-4-298 8879
Wairarapa Organisation for Older Persons .....	0-6-377 0066
Age Concern Wellington .....	0-4-499 6646

### South

Age Concern Nelson .....	0-3-544 7624
Westport - Buller REAP .....	0-3-789 7659
Age Concern Canterbury .....	0-3-366 0903
Timaru - Presbyterian Support South Canterbury .....	0-3-688 5029
Dunedin - Age Concern Otago .....	0-3-477 1040
Invercargill - Age Concern Southland .....	0-3-218 6351

[www.ageconcern.org.nz](http://www.ageconcern.org.nz)



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