

# Technology and Abuse in Later Life

## The Dynamics of Abuse in Later Life

Abuse in later life is the willful abuse, neglect, or financial exploitation of an older adult that is perpetrated by someone in an ongoing relationship of trust with the victim. Abusers may be, for example, a spouse, partner, family member, or caregiver. The term applies to victims who are age 50 and older.

As is true with interpersonal violence involving younger victims, power and control dynamics are often present in abuse in later life cases. It is common to find that perpetrators use many of the same abuser tactics found in domestic violence and sexual assault cases involving younger victims, like intimidation and stalking, to prevent older victims from seeking help or reporting their abuse. It should also be recognized that there are a number of unique abuser tactics used against older victims. Perpetrators of abuse in later life are often found to target vulnerabilities, neglect, isolate and psychologically or emotionally abuse their victims. To learn more about the dynamics of abuse in later life, please visit:

[www.ncall.us](http://www.ncall.us).

## Technology and Abuse in Later Life

Technology is an invaluable resource to aid older survivors in finding safety and coping with issues of abuse in later life. In this increasingly digital age, however, technology can be misused by abusers in dangerous, even lethal, ways.

Technologies that abusers misuse include, but are not limited to: phones, [emails](#), [text messaging](#), [instant messaging](#), computers, [applications](#), [spyware](#) or other computer monitoring tools, TTY (text telephones), relay services and other assistive devices, [GPS](#) and other location tracking services, cameras and a variety of other surveillance equipment.

The following pages provide an overview of the ways abusers might misuse technologies to cause harm to their victims. In addition to the tactics listed, many offenders justify or minimize the abuse and deny that they are abusive. Perpetrators may normalize the control and abuse by making comments like “this is for his own safety” or “she’s just too old to understand.”

## Tactics Used by Abusers

### Coercion and Threats

- Makes threats via email, Instant and text messages and social media.
- Forces victim to participate in illegal online activities.
- Posts photos or stories of victim online without his or her consent.
- Abuses victim for not responding to emails, calls or texts quickly enough.

### Emotional and Psychological Abuse

- Impersonates victim online. **For example:** creating a social media account using the victim’s name without his or her consent.
- Ridicules or puts down victim using technology.
- Manipulates technology to confuse or scare victim. **For example:** changing settings, making a computer talk/make sounds, etc.
- Sends victim disturbing or offensive information or website links.

### Financial Exploitation

- Tracks or manipulates victim’s financial accounts online.
- Denies victim’s access to online accounts.
- Uses technology to defraud victim of assets, titles or properties.
- Forces victim to make unwanted online purchases.

### Intimidating, Monitoring and Stalking

- Monitors victim’s activities, online or offline, using technology. **For example:** using spyware to track computer activity or hiding a cell phone in the victim’s car to listen to her and/or to track her location via GPS.

- Secretly changes victim's files or device settings.
- Constantly contacts victim using technology. **For example:** calling or texting repeatedly or sending unwanted messages.

### **Isolation**

- Cuts off or limits victim's technology use and access.
- Controls what the victim does and who he or she may contact online.
- Uses technology to discredit victim.

### **Targeting Vulnerabilities & Neglecting**

- Compromises safety and independence of victim by withholding, removing or damaging technology or assistive devices. **For example:** altering an electronic device's settings so that it doesn't function properly.
- Uses "safety" of victim as an excuse for controlling or limiting access to technology.

### **Using Family and Trusted Others**

- Misleads others (children, grandchildren, friends, caregivers) about victim's wellbeing. **For example:** sending emails from the victim's account to suggest that everything is fine or intercepting the victim's email to keep him or her from telling friends or family about the abuse or from seeking help.
- Misleads victim to distrust others. **For example:** telling the victim that a caregiver is making electronic withdrawals from his or her financial account.
- Discredits victim through electronic communication with family.
- Manipulates victim's family and trusted others to monitor online activities or get information such as account numbers or passwords. **For example:** convincing others that the victim is unfit to care for him or herself and therefore needs online supervision.

## Using Privilege and Oppression

- Makes all of the decisions about technology.
- Takes advantage of victim's lack of knowledge of technology.
- Makes victim feel stupid and incapable of understanding technology.
- Uses age of victim as an excuse for controlling or limiting access to technology.
- Withholds access to victim's online healthcare and telemedicine information.



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National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life,  
a project of End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin  
[www.ncall.us](http://www.ncall.us)