

## Preventing Incidents in the Long-Term Care Home

Extendicare believes all individuals in a long-term care home have the right to live, work or visit in an atmosphere free of abuse and aggression.

It's a worthy belief, founded in respect and concern for people. Too bad the real world sometimes gets in the way. Canadian citizens, for example, also have the right to live and work in a society free of abuse and aggression — and for the most part, we do. Yet who can deny that in spite of our rights, this kind of behaviour happens. It happens for many of the same reasons it can happen in a long-term care home: medical, environmental or people problems.

Extendicare views abuse and aggression in the home — whether it affects residents, staff, volunteers or visitors — as a very serious issue. We believe our success in managing it has to do with the policies and procedures we have in place that emphasize prevention and education. We also expect everyone to be aware of their rights, as well as their responsibilities.

Let's look at some of those responsibilities, but first, what is meant by abuse and aggression? Extendicare defines the two terms very specifically; to summarize, they mean the mistreatment or injury of a resident by another individual, or of an individual by a resident; for example:

- physical (e.g. kicking, pinching);
- verbal (e.g. insults);
- psychological (e.g. ignoring feelings);
- sexual (e.g. unwelcome sexual activity); or
- other harmful acts (e.g. failure to protect a resident's dignity).

A major cause of this type of behaviour as it relates to residents is the frustration they can feel when they are unable to act on their powerful need to have control over their lives: understandable, when one considers how much residents have lost or had to give up.

Understandable, perhaps, but not acceptable. At Extendicare, we believe we have a common goal: to foster a healthy, harmonious and safe environment for all. Although we thoroughly investigate every incident, we believe everyone associated with the home is responsible for doing what they can to help meet that goal. Here's what families can do.

*Help residents take charge of their lives by encouraging them to:*

- make choices and decisions — no matter how small;
- express their individuality; e.g. decorate their room;
- care for themselves; e.g. families could place needed objects within reach;
- have a purpose in life; e.g. perform useful tasks;
- help staff know the resident;
- tell staff about the resident's likes, dislikes and any changes in behaviour;
- attend the care conferences (so important!);
- keep a photo album, scrapbook or family portrait in the resident's room;
- work as a team with staff to meet the resident's needs.

*Protect the resident's dignity:*

- allow residents to express feelings of anger and listen with understanding;
- keep confidential or sensitive matters private;
- when in the same room, speak to the resident, not about the resident (no matter how severe you believe the resident's dementia to be);
- tell residents (and staff) about family news; e.g. births, deaths, marriages;

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- make sure residents have enough clothing and that it's in good repair;
- provide cash so residents can control their own spending.

*Know yourself:*

- don't wait when you have concerns: talk to staff right away;
- be well informed about the resident's disease or medical conditions;
- be aware of how you and the resident have usually related to one another, and avoid any hot buttons;
- model the behaviour you want to see: treat the resident as you would want to be treated.

If you suspect abuse or aggression in the home, or if you have any questions about this issue, please talk to the director of care at the long-term care home.