

# Paying it Back: Promoting Justice for LGBT Communities of All Ages

It is said that *it takes a village*. Ideally, we need **a village of people** working together, supporting LGBT older people to experience the peace and fulfillment they worked so hard to earn. As a member of a village that has been built up around one or more LGBT older people, there are many things you can do to take part in building and maintaining the supportive structures that promote justice, while preventing and addressing isolation and elder abuse in LGBT communities.

It's up to all of us to reinforce the supports around older people. Here are five ways that you can act as a **pillar of support**.



**1 Find more ways to connect.** Isolation is one of the clearest risk factors for elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Visit or call as often as you can, and encourage the older people you know to take a class, join a support group, attend a senior center (LGBT-specific or not), help out on a political campaign, or volunteer in their community. If they cannot or do not want to leave home, do a simple internet search to find friendly visitor programs or other volunteer opportunities they can access from home.



**2 Build self-esteem and healthy self-care habits.** Every person in our community not only deserves respect, happiness and equal treatment, but also need these good things to live healthily. Because of the social prejudices LGBT older people have had to live with, many believe they do not deserve respect, love, happiness, or other good things. You can overcome this by being a source of support and community. Be free with your compliments, and talk about positive social advances frequently. Whenever it makes sense to do so, point out how they helped make the world the better place that they should now enjoy. Promote opportunities for intergenerational spaces that promote dialogue, understanding, and support across the generations.



**3 Encourage them to plan ahead.** You can be supportive by helping older people identify their social network, and find trustworthy people to rely on. Support older people in picking trustworthy decision-makers for emergency situations and help them complete the paperwork to protect those choices. Ideally they should consider creating a will, medical and financial powers of attorney, health care proxies, and advance directives. Both the **National Association of Elder Law Attorneys** ([www.naela.org](http://www.naela.org)) and the **Center for Elder Rights Advocacy** (<http://legalhotlines.org>) can help you find a qualified lawyer. You can also work with LGBT and supportive lawyers to host a legal clinic on **National Health Care Directives Day** ([www.nhdd.org](http://www.nhdd.org)).



**4 Keep an open mind.** Try to keep all topics on the table. If it is appropriate, talk about your concerns, financial security, and other “sensitive” topics to build a rapport, and let the older person know that those are all subjects they can freely discuss with you.





**Help them find help.** Many LGBT older people survived by being private and self-sufficient. These admirable traits can keep an older person from accessing needed assistance. Assist them in locating supportive programs and assistants, and in checking caregivers' references. Keep your own eyes and ears open when you visit or talk to ensure you pick up and address any hints of problems. One place to find out about aging programs that may be available to help them is the **Eldercare Locator** at 1-800-677-1116 or <https://eldercare.acl.gov>.

**It is up to all of us to prevent and address elder abuse.** Read more to learn how identify elder abuse and where to find support and resources.

### **Know what types of behavior are abusive and unsupportive.**

Examples of elder abuse can be hard to think of. Having examples in mind will help you know what to look for. Examples of elder abuse include:

- Emotional and psychological abuse and mistreatment
- Sexual abuse
- Neglect or failure to provide care
- Financial exploitation and abuse

### **Know the warning signs of abuse.**

The signs can include:

- Repeated, perhaps explained-away, bruises, broken bones, or injuries;
- Physical or mental changes that might be due to overmedication or under-utilization of prescribed medications;
- A sudden change in the older person's behavior;
- A marked deterioration in the older person's appearance or housekeeping;
- A sudden negative change in the older person's financial status;
- Dehydration, malnutrition, poor personal hygiene, or untreated health problems;
- Hazardous, unsafe, unsanitary, or unclean living conditions;
- Unpaid bills or substandard care being provided even though adequate financial resources exist;
- New people or previously uninvolved relatives appearing in the older person's life, particularly if they seem overly interested in the older person's finances;
- Inappropriate and/or inadequate clothing;
- Absent or "lost" medical aids like eyeglasses, hearing aids, and dentures.



### **Get help from local experts.**

Every state has laws and an adult protective services agency that protect older people, including LGBT individuals. They can give you additional information and help investigate, intervene and resolve abuse and neglect situations. To locate your local resources, consult <http://www.napsa-now.org/get-help/help-in-your-area>.

## Identify abusers' tactics.

If there is someone in the older person's life who appears to be trying to keep them isolated from other people, be especially vigilant for other signs of abuse. Some of the LGBT-specific tactics abusers may use against an older person include:

- Isolating an older person from other people
- Threatening to "out" someone as LGBT
- Telling them authorities won't believe them or will hurt them because they're LGBT;
- Convincing them that if it weren't for the abuser, they'd spend the rest of their lives alone; and
- Telling them that the situation is the best an LGBT older person can expect.



Be proactive and ask questions if you sense you are being shut out of the LGBT older person's life; it could be their preference, but it could also signal they are in trouble.

## Learn what protections exist for aging services consumers.

When a new service is contracted for or the older person enters a congregate living setting, obtain the resident or consumer bill of rights, review their nondiscrimination policy, ask if they train their staff on LGBT cultural competency, review the procedure for addressing concerns, and learn who is available to help resolve problems. For example, every nursing home resident has access to a long-term care ombudsman who can help them assert their rights.

## Be thoughtful about living arrangements.

Living with someone who has a history of violent or abusive behavior, or who has a substance abuse problem can create a dangerous situation for older people. We all want to help those in need, but all of these characteristics are strongly associated with abusing older people. Help them identify other options that will not risk their life and well-being.

## Get support from service providers if needed.

This does not need to be a confrontation. There are now many resources to help service providers improve their skills in meeting all of their customers' needs. Pass along resources you have printed out from the National Resource Center on LGBT Aging at <https://www.lgbtagingcenter.org>.

## Encourage caregivers to access support.

Providing care and support to an older person in need is often more exhausting and stressful than anticipated. Help caregivers find and use the housekeeping, meal preparation, and other services that are available through area agencies on aging (which can be accessed through the Eldercare Locator at 1-800-677-1116 or <https://eldercare.acl.gov>). These services exist to help maintain older people in community settings.

## A strong community values all members and treats everyone with respect.

Taking steps to support older people and identify, address and prevent elder abuse makes our community stronger and repays older people for all the work that have done to build community. Help us build on their hard work and maintain a community that supports everyone.

## RESOURCES

**Adult Protective Services (APS)** exist in every state. Whom they're allowed to serve and how they serve them differ from state to state, but start here if you think you are experiencing abuse, neglect, or exploitation. Find your local APS via <http://www.napsa-now.org>.

**Area Agencies on Aging** are the gateways to many services and protections. Find the one for your area through the Eldercare Locator website (<https://eldercare.acl.gov>) or phone number (1-800-677-1116).

The **Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB)** has a special section specifically for older people that can help you manage and protect your money. Check out CFPB's website at <https://www.consumerfinance.gov/practitioner-resources/resources-for-older-adults> or call them at 855-411-CFPB (855-411-2372).

The **National Center on Elder Abuse** is your best source for learning more about elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Their website is at <https://ncea.acl.gov>.

Are you using or thinking about long-term care services? The **National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care** (<http://theconsumervoic.org>) should be your first stop for information and support. They can also put you in touch with the long-term care ombudsman in your area, who is publicly funded to provide support and advocacy for residents and families of residents in long-term care facilities.

The **National Council on Aging (NCOA)** offers many resources related to healthy aging and public policy issues. Their website is at <https://www.ncoa.org>, or you can call them at 571-527-3900. Their *BenefitsCheckUp* website at <https://www.benefitscheckup.org> provides an easy online way to find out what assistance programs you may be eligible for.

The **National Resource Center on LGBT Aging** at <https://www.lgbtagingcenter.org> hosts an extensive, indexed collection of resources (both publications and services) that can help you address basic aging as well as LGBT issues. They can also point you to services that have had specific training in working with LGBT older people, and they can provide LGBT training if you know an aging services agency that needs it, or if you know an LGBT group that needs training on aging issues.

**SAGE** advocates with and on behalf of LGBT elders and provides many useful resources including a list of affiliates across the country. Their website is at <https://www.sageusa.org>.



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