

# Adult-Child to Parent Abuse in London **Good Practice Toolkit**

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### **Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime**

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# Introduction

We are pleased to present this good practice toolkit for professionals who work with families experiencing adult-child to parent abuse (ACPA). This work emerges from a comprehensive research project which sought to understand the prevalence, nature and impact of this form of abuse in London. It was commissioned by the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) and delivered by a team of researchers/practitioners led by Equality Collabs.

The research revealed that adult-child to parent abuse is a complex issue that intersects with multiple vulnerabilities including mental health, substance use, and care responsibilities. Families often struggle in silence due to shame, fear and complex loyalty bonds. Throughout our research, parents consistently expressed their deep desire for the abuse to stop while also wanting support and help for their adult-child. This demonstrates the complex dynamics professionals must navigate, balancing victims' safety with an improved systemic response to meeting the adult-child's underlying needs.

This toolkit is designed for any professional who may encounter adult-child to parent abuse in their work - including domestic abuse practitioners, social workers, healthcare professionals and police officers. It provides practical guidance on spotting signs, assessing risk, multi-agency case management and where professionals and families can access further support.

We are deeply grateful to everyone who contributed to this work. We particularly thank our trial partners - Islington Council, Waythrough (DVIP services), and Central and North West London (CNWL) NHS Trust - for their collaboration in testing and refining these approaches.

Most importantly, we thank the parents and families who shared their experiences with us. Their courage in speaking out helps break the silence around adult-child to parent abuse and shapes better support for others. Their message was clear: they want the abuse to stop, but they also want help for their adult-children. This toolkit aims to support professionals in meeting both these needs.

We hope this toolkit proves valuable in your work supporting families affected by adult-child to parent abuse.

# Adult-Child to Parent Abuse: The Basics



## What is it?

Adult-child to parent abuse represents a complex pattern of behaviours where adult-children use various means to exert power and control over their parents. Much like intimate partner abuse, it often involves a web of controlling behaviours that force parents to adapt their lives to accommodate their adult-child's demands (Holt, 2015).

These behaviours can include physical, emotional, psychological, sexual and financial abuse, and can be particularly exacerbated by complex caring dynamics between child and parent, as well as disabilities, housing issues, substance misuse and serious mental illness.

## Understanding the Interpersonal Dynamics

Recent data from the ONS reveals the gravity of this issue: parents comprise 25% of all domestic homicide victims, with mothers making up 53% of these cases and sons being the majority perpetrators at 91% (ONS, 2023).

Every parent/survivor's journey is unique. However the research shows that often parents do not want their child to get in trouble or face punitive consequences. In our experience, parents have overwhelmingly wanted to get help for their child to stop the abuse.

# Adult-Child to Parent Abuse: Spotting the Signs



Adult-child to parent violence and abuse can be difficult to identify. Parents often hide what's happening due to shame, fear and/or complex loyalty to their adult-child. Our research shows abuse rarely exists in isolation - it usually intersects with other vulnerabilities like mental health, substance use, and care responsibilities.

This resource will help you identify both visible and hidden signs of abuse, understand contributing factors, and consider intersecting issues that may increase risk. It should be used alongside your professional judgment and existing risk assessment tools.

## Key Practice Points

- Consider how different factors interact and compound risk
- Look beyond presenting issues to identify hidden harms
- Always respond to immediate safety alongside longer-term risk
- Document *patterns* of behaviour rather than just 'incidents'
- Consider specialist referrals for specific contributing factors

## Physical Signs of Adult-Child to Parent Abuse

### What You Might See:

- Unexplained injuries or recurring "accidents"
- Flinching when adult-child moves suddenly
- Signs of physical restraint (grip marks)
- Frequent visits to A&E or GP
- Wearing concealing clothing regardless of weather
- Signs of sleep deprivation or exhaustion
- Medical attendance at different hospitals/GPs
- Injuries in various stages of healing

### What to Explore:

- Pattern and frequency of injuries
- Explanations given for injuries
- Any changes in healthcare-seeking behavior
- Access to medical care - is it restricted?
- Whether injuries are documented consistently
- If parent seems reluctant to discuss injuries
- Whether parent is registered at multiple medical practices
- Any avoided topics during medical discussions
- Any history of similar injuries

## Care Relationships and Dependencies

### What You Might See

- Signs of carer stress/fatigue
- Neglect of health needs
- Controlling behaviour in caring role
- Missed medical appointments

### What to Explore

- Two-way caring responsibilities
- Access to carer support
- Impact on wider family
- Need for carers assessment

# Adult-Child to Parent Abuse: Spotting the Signs



## Housing and Financial Situation

### What You Might See

- Damage to property
- Missing valuable items
- Parent unable to afford basics
- Restricted access to parts of home

### What to Explore

- Reason for shared living arrangement
- Financial dependencies
- Control over household decisions
- Housing security concerns

## Mental Health and Substance Use

### What You Might See

- Signs of substance use in the home
- Missed mental health appointments
- Escalation of behaviour during crisis
- Medication non-compliance

### What to Explore

- Current mental health support
- History of dual diagnosis
- Access to treatment
- Parent's understanding of mental health needs

## Cultural and Social Context

### What You Might See

- Reluctance to discuss family issues
- Language barriers in appointments
- Social isolation
- Family members acting as interpreters

### What to Explore

- Cultural attitudes to family privacy
- Immigration status concerns
- Access to community support
- Need for interpreter services

## Relationship Dynamics

### What You Might See

- adult-child dominating conversations
- Parent appearing anxious
- Constant checking of phones
- Making excuses for behaviour

### What to Explore

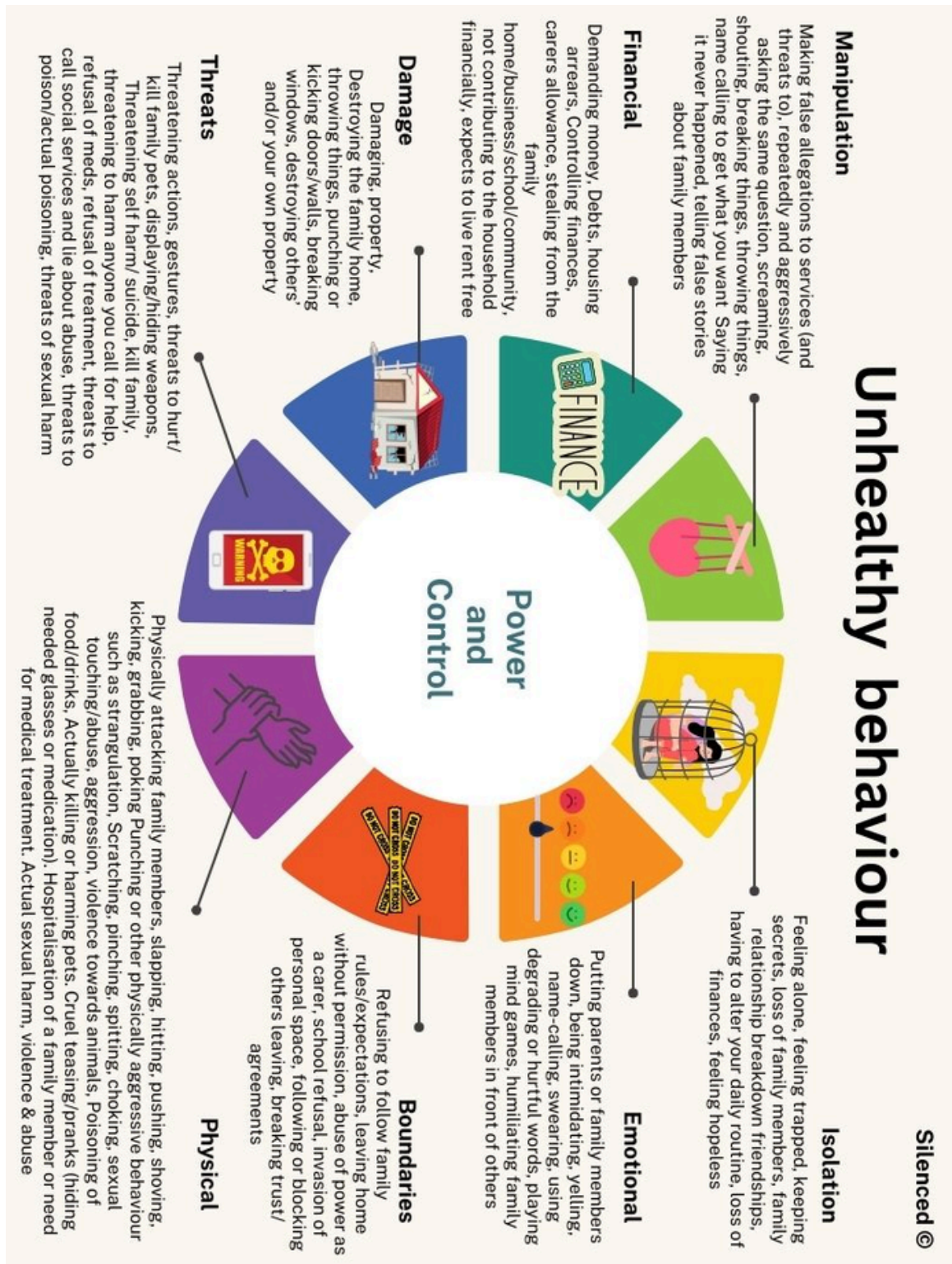
- History of challenging behaviour
- Previous attempts to seek help
- Impact on wider family relationships
- Support network availability

# Adult-Child to Parent Abuse: Power and Control Wheels\*



\*This resource has been created by Silenced CIC and is an adaptation of the Family Abuse and Mutual Respect Wheels developed by Routt and Anderson (2015) based on the Duluth Power and Control Wheels (Pence, McDonnell & Paymar, 1982). These tools can be used to aid professional understanding and response-based practice. This resource has been reproduced here with the permission of Silenced CIC and is free to use for practitioners. Further information and guidance on using the wheels can be found at [silenced.org.uk](https://silenced.org.uk)

# Adult-Child to Parent Abuse: Power and Control Wheels\*



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# Adult-Child to Parent Abuse: Guidance for Healthcare Professionals



Adult-child to parent abuse has been identified as a significant challenge facing healthcare professionals. Research shows that GPs and other healthcare providers are often the first point of contact for parents experiencing abuse from their adult-children, making it crucial that staff understand this complex form of family abuse. This guide is not a substitute for proper training and embedded organisational understanding of this issue.

## Impact on Parents' Health and Wellbeing

Parents experiencing adult-child to parent abuse often present with multiple health issues:

- Physical injuries requiring medical attention
- Anxiety, depression, and chronic stress
- Sleep disturbance and fatigue
- Self-medication with drugs or alcohol as a coping mechanism
- Stress-related conditions (e.g., diverticulitis, cystitis)
- Deteriorating existing health conditions due to stress
- Neglect of their own healthcare needs

## Barriers to Disclosure

- Deep-seated shame and stigma
- Fear of consequences for their adult-child
- Cultural and religious beliefs about family privacy
- Concerns about immigration status
- Language barriers
- Fear of not being believed or understood
- Previous negative experiences with services
- Complex caring responsibilities

## Best Practice Guidelines for Health Professionals

### 1. Create safe spaces for disclosure

- Ensure private consultation spaces
- Offer independent interpreters (never use family members)
- Make time for longer appointments when needed
- Build trust through consistent, non-judgmental support
- Consider offering telephone/video consultations if safer for the parent

### 2. Ask about adult-child to parent abuse

Consider using indirect questions that parents might find easier to answer:

- "How are things at home?"
- "How are things going with X?"
- "Are you getting the support you need at home?"
- "Are you going to be able to get hold of this medication ok? How can we make sure it gets to you?"

# Adult-Child to Parent Abuse: Guidance for Healthcare Professionals



## 3. Respond effectively to disclosure

- Acknowledge their courage and thank them for speaking up
- Validate their experience: "This is not your fault"
- Express concern for their safety and wellbeing
- Recognise the complexity of parent and adult-child relationships
- Be aware that parents may be reluctant to pursue formal action
- Document injuries and disclosures carefully
- Consider safeguarding needs, particularly for vulnerable adults

## 4. Understand the complex dynamics

Be aware that:

- Many parents want to protect their children above anything else
- Mental health issues and substance abuse often co-exist with adult-child to parent abuse
- Parents may have caring responsibilities for their adult-child
- adult-children may also be carers for their parents
- Immigration status may affect help-seeking behaviour
- Cultural factors may influence family dynamics
- Previous trauma may impact current situations

## 5. Making appropriate referrals

We do not suggest you undertake a risk assessment yourself unless it is a formal part of your role. Follow the appropriate safeguarding pathway for your role.

## 6. Support ongoing care

- Schedule follow-up appointments
- Monitor health impacts
- Consider using coding systems that flag child to parent abuse concerns
- Maintain detailed records
- Share information appropriately with other agencies
- Support access to longer-term therapeutic support

## Remember

- Adult-child to parent abuse is a form of domestic abuse that requires sensitivity
- Parents may not recognise their situation as abuse
- Building trust is essential for effective intervention
- Cultural competency is crucial
- Consider intersecting vulnerabilities
- Maintain professional curiosity
- Regular risk assessment by the appropriate professionals is vital
- Support should be long-term and consistent

# Adult-Child to Parent Abuse: Guidance for Community Safety/ Criminal Justice Professionals



Adult-child to parent abuse has been identified as a significant challenge facing police, probation officers and other criminal justice practitioners. Research shows that police are often called during crisis situations, making it crucial that officers and wider CJS staff understand this complex form of family abuse. This guide is not a substitute for proper training and embedded organisational understanding of this issue.

## Impact on Parents' Safety and Wellbeing

Parents experiencing adult-child to parent abuse often present with multiple safety concerns:

- Physical injuries requiring police intervention
- Property damage within the home
- Financial abuse and exploitation
- Threatening and intimidating behaviour
- Escalating patterns of controlling behaviour
- Living in constant fear in their own home
- Limited access to parts of their own property

## Barriers to Engagement with Criminal Justice System

- Deep-seated reluctance to criminalise their own child
- Fear of consequences for their adult-child (e.g., homelessness, criminal record)
- Concern about worsening mental health of adult-child
- Cultural and religious beliefs about family privacy
- Concerns about immigration status
- Language barriers
- Previous negative or discriminatory experiences with police or courts
- Complex caring responsibilities and dependencies

## Best Practice Guidelines for First Response

### 1. Create safe conditions for disclosure

- Speak with parent separately from adult-child
- Use professional interpreters (never family members)
- Attend with mental health professionals when possible
- Approach with non-judgmental attitude
- Consider conducting follow-up visits when crisis has passed

### 2. Ask about adult-child to parent abuse

Consider starting with indirect questions that parents might find easier to answer before moving to specifics:

- "It looks like things are really tough right now, how are you feeling?"
- "Do you feel safe at home?"
- "Are you afraid of what might happen when we leave today?"
- "Do you feel able to access all areas of your home?"
- "Does everyone at home respect the house? Does it get damaged on purpose?"
- "Do you feel in control of your money and that it's safe?"

# Adult-Child to Parent Abuse: Guidance for Community Safety/ Criminal Justice Professionals



## 3. Respond effectively to disclosure

- Acknowledge their courage and thank them for speaking up
- Validate their experience: "This is not your fault"
- Express concern for their safety and wellbeing
- Recognise the complexity of parent-adult-child relationships
- Understand parents may be reluctant to pursue formal action
- Document incidents and disclosures carefully
- Consider safeguarding needs, particularly for vulnerable adults

## 4. Understand the complex dynamics

Be aware that:

- Many parents want to protect their children above anything else
- Mental health issues and substance misuse often co-exist with adult-child to parent abuse
- Parents may have caring responsibilities for their adult-child
- adult-children may also be carers for their parents
- Immigration status may affect help-seeking behaviour
- Cultural factors may influence family dynamics
- Previous trauma may impact current situations

## 5. Assess the risk and safety plan effectively

- Be aware that standard DASH may not fully capture adult-child to parent abuse dynamics
- Consider wider contextual factors (mental health, substance use, housing)
- Assess risk as dynamic rather than static
- Safety planning should consider options when leaving is not preferred
- Consider room-specific safety within shared accommodation
- Explore the possibility of "sanctuary" measures if appropriate
- Develop strategies for accessing emergency help
- If removing the adult-child from the home is necessary, carefully consider whether it is safe to place them with another family member before doing so

## 6. Make appropriate referrals

- Consider MARAC referral for high-risk cases
- Refer to specialist domestic abuse services
- Consider a mental health assessment for the adult-child
- Explore substance abuse support if relevant
- Consider adult social care referral for vulnerable adults
- Link with housing services where needed
- Identify specialist perpetrator programmes where available

# Adult-Child to Parent Abuse: Guidance for Community Safety/ Criminal Justice Professionals



## 7. Explore legal options and enforcement with parent(s)

- Discuss all available legal options clearly
- Consider DVPNs/DVPOs where appropriate
- Explore civil options (non-molestation orders, occupation orders)
- Discuss implications of pursuing criminal charges
- Consider mental health legislation when relevant
- Balance enforcement with the adult-child's support needs
- Plan for housing implications of legal measures

## 8. Document well and appropriately share the information

- Record incidents as domestic abuse
- Add specific adult-child to parent abuse marker
- Document *patterns* as well as isolated incidents
- Maintain detailed records of all interventions
- Share information appropriately with partner agencies
- Consider multi-agency forums for complex cases
- Ensure victim safety when sharing information

## Remember

- Adult-child to parent abuse is a form of domestic abuse that requires sensitivity
- Parents may not recognise their situation as abuse
- Building trust is essential for effective intervention
- Cultural competency is crucial
- Consider intersecting vulnerabilities
- Maintain professional curiosity
- Regular risk assessment is vital
- Support should be long-term and consistent

# Adult-Child to Parent Abuse:

## ACPA Family Needs and Risks Action Group:

### Terms of Reference Template



#### How to use this resource

This Terms of Reference (TOR) template has been developed to help professionals set up (or embed into existing forums) multi-agency 'action groups' to assess and manage ACPA cases. It has been co-developed with Islington Council in response to research with parents and carers. A key finding was that parents want more robust and comprehensive support for their adult children who are using harmful behaviour. While safety remains paramount, this framework deliberately shifts focus towards identifying and addressing the adult-child's complex needs, including mental health, substance use, housing, and trauma.

The TOR is designed to be used alongside the ACPA Family Needs and Risks Tool, creating a comprehensive framework for both assessing and responding to cases. Together, these resources support early intervention, sustainable behaviour change, and coordinated support, while maintaining necessary risk management.

This approach recognises that many adult-children using violence and abuse may have their own significant support needs that, if addressed effectively, could reduce harmful behaviour and improve family outcomes. By combining the ACPA Family Needs and Risks Tool with this panel framework, professionals can ensure both thorough assessment and appropriate response.

Professionals should adapt this template according to local needs and resources, while maintaining its core emphasis on addressing the adult-child's complex needs as a route to achieving long-term safety within the family.

# Adult-Child to Parent Abuse:

## ACPA Family Needs and Risks Action Group:

### Terms of Reference Template



#### 1. Purpose

The purpose of the Action Group is to:

- Provide coordinated, multi-agency support and intervention for adult-children using abuse towards parent(s)/parental figure(s)
- Enable early identification and comprehensive assessment of the adult-child's needs
- Develop holistic intervention plans that address complex support needs including mental health, substance misuse, housing, and trauma
- Develop holistic intervention plans that consider multiple victims and identify indicators of high risk
- Share information effectively to ensure appropriate support while managing risk
- Monitor and review the effectiveness of adult-child focused interventions
- Create sustainable pathways for behaviour change

#### 2. Scope

The Action Group will consider cases where:

- The adult-child is aged 18 or over
- There is evidence of violence, abuse, or controlling behaviour towards parent(s)/step-parent(s)/grandparent(s)/carer(s) or other parental figure(s)

#### 3. Core Membership

To ensure comprehensive support, consider the following members for the core Action Group:

- Child to Parent Abuse Services/Specialists (where available)
- Mental Health Services (including dual diagnosis specialists)
- Substance Misuse Services
- Housing Services and Homelessness Support
- Adult Social Care
- Police
- Primary Care/Health Services
- Perpetrator/Behaviour Change Services/Specialists

Suggested additional members based on case specifics and identified needs:

- Children's Social Care
- Probation Service
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Services
- Employment/Education Support Services
- Specialist domestic abuse services (including IDVAs)
- Specialist 'by and for' services

# Adult-Child to Parent Abuse:

## ACPA Family Needs and Risks Action Group:

### Terms of Reference Template



#### 4. Approach to Support and Intervention

##### Core Principles

- Work towards sustainable solutions rather than short-term crisis management.
- Recognise the unique dynamics of the parent and adult-child relationship. This includes parents saying that they want the abuse to stop and they want their child to have effective support to make positive change.
- Recognise that many adult children may have their own support needs and traumatic experiences. Maintain and monitor accountability for harmful behaviour alongside support for positive change.
- Maintain a strong understanding of risk and monitor high-risk indicators, incorporating appropriate safety measures into plans.
- Recognise and monitor the multiple victims often present in these cases - including intimate partners - and liaise with relevant agencies and incorporate into plans accordingly.
- Map the professionals/agencies who are involved and who should be involved to inform effective action planning.
- Always consider cultural and contextual factors in behaviour and intervention.

##### Assessment Framework

##### *Comprehensive needs assessment including:*

- Mental health
- Substance use
- Housing stability
- Financial security
- Social networks
- Accountability for actions
- Employment/ education
- Experiences of trauma/ victimisation
- Wider family relationships
- Service engagement
- Disabilities/ health and care needs

##### Intervention Planning

##### *Personalised support plans addressing:*

- Immediate support needs (housing, mental health, substance use)
- Medium-term stability (employment, education, relationships)
- Long-term behaviour change
- Cultural and faith needs
- Family relationships where appropriate
- Practical life skills
- Emotional regulation
- Healthy coping mechanisms

# Adult-Child to Parent Abuse: ACPA Family Needs and Risks Action Group: Terms of Reference Template



## 5. Operational Procedures

### Referral Process

- Open to referrals from any member agency
- Early intervention priority where possible

### Case Management

- Named lead professional for each case
- Regular review of support plan effectiveness
- Adjustments based on engagement and progress
- Clear communication channels between agencies
- Recognition of setbacks as part of change process

## 6. Measuring Progress

*Progress should be tracked and recorded at each Action Group review. Progress indicators will include:*

- Reduction in harmful behaviours
- Effective intervention planning and demonstrated through reduction in needs across domains
- Development of positive coping strategies and effectiveness

## 7. Safety Considerations

- Review of risk and high risk flags at every Action Group
- Clear protocols for information sharing
- Links to victim's support services
- Emergency planning where needed
- Appropriate safeguarding measures

## 8. Cultural Competency

- Ensure cultural understanding informs support
- Work with community organisations
- Provide interpreters where needed
- Consider faith and cultural practices
- Never use family members as interpreters
- Recognise cultural barriers to engagement

*These terms of reference should be reviewed by the Action Group:*

- Every six months initially*
- When new support services become available*
- Following significant learning from cases*
- When new guidance or research emerges*

# Adult-Child to Parent Abuse: Resource Directory



Adult-child to parent abuse is a relatively new and emerging field of understanding. This directory is by no means exhaustive but is designed to support professionals' further exploration of this issue.

The information provided in this resource is accurate as of March 2025.

## **Specialist Child to Parent Abuse Organisations**

Waythrough (DVIP services)

*Specialist service providing direct support to families experiencing adult-child to parent abuse where the child is under 25 years old.*

- Website: [waythrough.org.uk](https://waythrough.org.uk)

RISE Mutual CIC

*Specialist programmes for families based on Non-Violent Resistance (NVR) practices.*

- Website: [risemutual.org/child-to-parent-violence](https://risemutual.org/child-to-parent-violence)

PEGS (Parental Education Growth Support)

*Specialist service supporting parents experiencing child and adult-child to parent abuse.*

- Website: [pegssupport.co.uk/how-pegss-help](https://pegssupport.co.uk/how-pegss-help)

CAPA First Response

*Child and adolescent to parent abuse services.*

- Website: [capafirstresponse.org](https://capafirstresponse.org)

Silenced CIC

*Training for professionals on using the child to parent abuse power and control wheels.*

- Website: [silenced.org.uk](https://silenced.org.uk)

## **Broader Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Support**

Respect

*National domestic abuse organisation working with perpetrators.*

- Respect phoneline for people using abusive behaviour: 0808 802 4040
- Website: [www.respect.org.uk](https://www.respect.org.uk)

# Adult-Child to Parent Abuse: Resource Directory



## **Substance Misuse Support**

Adfam

*National charity working with families affected by drugs and alcohol. Work includes an Adult-Child to Parent Abuse Toolkit in the context of substance misuse.*

- Website: [www.adfam.org.uk](http://www.adfam.org.uk)

## **Elder Abuse Support**

Hourglass

*National charity specialising in preventing the abuse of older people, with a helpline.*

- 24/7 Helpline: 0808 808 8141
- Website: [wearehourglass.org](http://wearehourglass.org)

Dewis Choice

*National charity specialising in domestic abuse in later life. Work includes a Safety Plan Template for older people that considers dementia.*

- Website: [dewischoice.org.uk/information-and-advice/resources](http://dewischoice.org.uk/information-and-advice/resources)

## **Support for Adoptive Parents**

The Potato Group

*Support network focused on adoptive families experiencing child and adult-child to parent violence and abuse.*

- Website: [thepotatogroup.org.uk/](http://thepotatogroup.org.uk/)

## **Accessing Local Support**

Contact your local:

- Domestic abuse service
- Housing and homelessness service
- Adult safeguarding team
- Mental health services
- Substance misuse services

Your local authority website should list available services and referral pathways.