

LGBT Older People: Our Right to a Peaceful Life

Everyone has the right to live in contented peace, no matter their age or capacity. Unfortunately, our social structures are not as strong as they need to be. As a result, too many older people become isolated and at risk of experiencing abuse, neglect, or exploitation. This is particularly true for LGBT older people, who may have fewer biological relatives to lean on and who may feel safer staying out of or quiet in community settings. We are all entitled to live a life free of abuse. And there are individual and collective steps we can take to remodel and reconstruct the way we care for and support older people so that everyone stays connected to their community.

Here are **ten steps** to feel empowered and advocate for yourself to have the peaceful life you have worked and fought for.

1 Respect yourself.

Because of the social prejudices LGBT older people have had to live with, many of us believe that we don't deserve respect, love, happiness, or other good things. Not true! You survived those times and those voices; now it is time for you to be supported by the community and society you helped build. If you are in a relationship with someone who is being emotionally, physically, or financially abusive, seek support. Contact the **National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs** for additional resources at <https://avp.org/ncavp>.

2 Stay connected to others.

This may take some effort, but it is well worth it. Not sure how to make new friends? Take a class, join a support group, attend a senior center (LGBT-specific or not), help out on a political campaign, or volunteer. If you have a telephone and/or computer, you don't even need to leave home to remain connected!

3 Be suspicious.

If you are hearing yourself think, "this is too good to be true," or "maybe I should get someone to look this document over before I sign it," pay attention! Never sign a legal or financial document without having it reviewed by someone you trust.

4 Pick trustworthy decision-makers for emergency situations.

Proactive choices backed by the proper paperwork can keep you surrounded by loving supporters and out of the hands of those with their own motives. 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) and the **Center for Elder Rights Advocacy** (<http://legalhotlines.org>) can help you find a qualified lawyer.

5 Be willing to ask for help.

Developing self-sufficiency helped many of us survive a hostile world. Unfortunately, that "I'll do it alone" stance is not always helpful as we age and develop new needs or limitations. Be willing to reach out for support. Contact your local **Area Agency on Aging** (you can get their contact information from <https://eldercare.acl.gov> or by calling 1-800-677-1116) to learn about available help with housekeeping, meal preparation, personal care, transportation, and much more. Make sure to ask for and check references.



6 When something isn't going right, ask for advice.

There are now programs, laws and trained advocates who can guide you to options you would not think of on your own. The world has changed, and many more people than you might think will be on your side. For general aging services, call **Eldercare Locator** at 1-800-677-1116 or check their website at <https://eldercare.acl.gov>. For abuse, neglect, and exploitation concerns, call your local adult protective services. You can find the right phone numbers at <http://www.napsa-now.org/get-help/help-in-your-area>.

7 Be free with your heart, but protect your checkbook.

There are people who specifically befriend LGBT older people so they can drain their bank accounts. This is where having lots of friends and social connections help: they make you look less like a good victim, and they may be able to help you think things through if a new friend or lover seems to have a whole lot of bills to pay.

8 Bias can explain many, but not all bad experiences.

When in doubt, seek help. There are laws against violence, emotional abuse, taking financial advantage of someone, sexual abuse, refusing to provide care to someone you're responsible for, etc. There are also programs designed to help. Call your local adult protective services if any of these are happening to you; consult <http://www.napsa-now.org/get-help/help-in-your-area> to find the right places to call.

9 Choose living arrangements carefully.

Do not agree to live with someone who has a history of violent or abusive behavior, or who has a substance abuse problem. We all want to help those in need, but all of these characteristics are strongly associated with abusing older people. Do not risk your life and well-being. If you are already living with someone with these problems, contact the **National Domestic Violence Hotline** at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) and www.thehotline.org/help.

10 Do not give others access to your finances.

It may be "convenient" today, but giving someone your debit card or other financial access can lead tomorrow to "loans" or outright theft. If you need help managing your finances, call your local Area Agency on Aging, which you can find via the **Eldercare Locator** website (<https://eldercare.acl.gov>) or phone number (1-800-677-1116).

The important thing to remember is that **you are not alone.**

Community members and community organizations are coming together to put up supports around you. Their collective efforts to make a strong community build on the foundation for an inclusive community that you created. Working together to provide the support, education and resources that older people need continues the tradition of justice and inclusion for all.



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://theconsumervoice.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>.



This fact sheet was completed for the National Center on Elder Abuse situated at Keck School of Medicine at the University of Southern California by SAGE's National Resource Center on LGBT Aging and FORGE and is supported in part by a grant (No. 90ABRC000101-02) from the Administration for Community Living, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). Grantees carrying out projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their findings and conclusions. Therefore, points of view or opinions do not necessarily represent official ACL or DHHS policy.