Safeguarding Adults at Risk: Psychological Abuse

Psychological abuse is a form of abuse that can occur in any setting where an individual has care and support needs, including health and social care. This type of abuse can have devastating effects on individuals, leading to long-lasting trauma and mental health problems. In this blog, we will discuss what psychological abuse is, the legislation surrounding it, and common examples of this form of abuse. We will also explore the importance of safeguarding training for health and social care staff.

What is psychological abuse in health and social care?

Psychological abuse, also known as emotional abuse, is the attempt by a perpetrator to scare, control, isolate, or otherwise harm an individual through emotional manipulation or intimidation. This can involve a wide range of behaviors that cause an individual to feel scared, helpless, or worthless.

Psychological abuse can occur in many settings, including nursing homes, hospitals, and in the community. It can be perpetrated by family members, caregivers, or anyone in a position of power over an individual.

Psychological abuse can take many forms, such as constant criticism, humiliation, intimidation, and threats of harm. It can also involve controlling behavior, such as restricting access to food, medication, or other necessities. Cyberbullying is another form of psychological abuse, which can occur online or through digital devices.

The Care Act 2014 (safeguarding adults)

The Care Act 2014 is a law that sets out how local authorities should protect adults at risk of abuse or neglect. The Act defines an adult at risk as someone who has care and support needs and is unable to protect themselves from abuse or neglect. Under the Care Act, local authorities have a duty to make inquiries if they have reason to suspect that an adult at risk is being abused or neglected. This includes psychological abuse.

The Care Act also requires local authorities to work with relevant partners, including health and social care providers, to prevent abuse from occurring in the first place. This involves providing appropriate support

and interventions to individuals and their families, as well as ensuring that staff are trained in safeguarding adults at risk.

The Care Act emphasizes the importance of person-centered care, which means that the needs and preferences of the individual should be at the center of all decision-making. This includes ensuring that individuals have the right to make their own choices, and that their views and opinions are taken into account when making decisions about their care and support.

What are the common examples of psychological abuse?

Psychological abuse can take many forms, and it is important to be aware of the common examples so that it can be recognized and addressed appropriately. Some of the most common examples of psychological abuse include:

Abandonment

Abandonment refers to a tactic used by the abuser to create a sense of fear, insecurity, and powerlessness in the victim. This can involve threats or actions that suggest the abuser will leave or abandon the victim if they don't comply with their demands or behave in a certain way.

For example, an abusive partner may threaten to leave or end the relationship if their partner doesn't do what they want or behave in a certain way. They may also use isolation tactics, such as preventing the victim from seeing friends and family or controlling their access to resources, to make the victim more dependent on them and more afraid of being abandoned.

Psychological abandonment can have a significant impact on the victim's mental health and well-being, leading to feelings of anxiety, depression, and a loss of trust in others. It can also make it difficult for the victim to leave the abusive situation, as they may feel trapped and unable to support themselves without the abuser.

Blaming

Blaming involves holding the victim responsible for the abuser's behavior or emotions, or accusing them of causing the abuse or being deserving of it.

For example, an abusive partner may blame their behavior on the victim, saying that they wouldn't have acted that way if the victim hadn't provoked them or made them angry. They may also blame the victim for not meeting their needs or expectations, or for being too needy or demanding.

Blaming can have a significant impact on the victim's self-esteem and mental health, leading to feelings of guilt, shame, and worthlessness. It can also make it difficult for the victim to recognize and address the abuse, as they may feel responsible for causing it or believe that they deserve it.

Coercion

Coercion involves using threats or pressure to control the victim's behavior or choices. This can involve physical, emotional, or financial coercion.

For example, an abusive partner may use physical coercion to force the victim to comply with their demands or to prevent them from leaving the relationship. They may also use emotional coercion, such as threatening to harm themselves or others if the victim doesn't do what they want or threatening to abandon the victim if they don't comply.

Financial coercion can also be used, where the abuser may control access to money, resources or employment opportunities, making it difficult for the victim to leave the abusive situation and maintain independence.

Coercion can have a significant impact on the victim's mental health and well-being, leading to feelings of anxiety, depression, and a loss of control over their own life. It can also make it difficult for the victim to leave the abusive situation, as they may feel trapped and unable to support themselves without the abuser.

Controlling

Controlling behavior involves trying to dictate and restrict the victim's actions, thoughts, and behaviors, often using intimidation, threats, or manipulation.

For example, an abusive partner may try to control the victim's movements, behavior, and communication by monitoring their phone or computer activity, dictating what they wear or eat, or isolating them from friends and family. They may also try to control the victim's thoughts and beliefs, by insisting that their opinions are the only correct ones, or by minimizing the victim's feelings or experiences.

Controlling behavior can have a significant impact on the victim's mental health and well-being, leading to feelings of anxiety, depression, and a loss of self-esteem. It can also make it difficult for the victim to leave the abusive situation, as they may feel that they are unable to make decisions for themselves or that they have no support outside of the relationship.

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying occurs online, through the use of technology and digital platforms. It involves the use of communication tools such as social media, email, messaging apps, and other digital platforms to harass, intimidate, or humiliate another person.

Cyberbullying can take many forms, including spreading rumors or false information, sharing embarrassing or private information without consent, making threatening or abusive comments, or creating fake profiles or accounts to harass or impersonate the victim.

Cyberbullying can have a significant impact on the victim's mental health and well-being, leading to feelings of anxiety, depression, and social isolation. It can also make it difficult for the victim to escape the abuse, as the online harassment can follow them wherever they go.

It is important to take cyberbullying seriously and to seek help and support if you or someone you know is experiencing it. This can include reporting the abuse to the appropriate authorities, blocking or unfollowing the abuser, and reaching out to a trusted friend, family member, or mental health professional for support.

Deprivation of contact

Deprivation of contact involves limiting or controlling a person's access to others, including friends, family, and support networks. This can involve isolating a person from their social circles, denying them access to communication tools such as phones or the internet, or preventing them from leaving the house or engaging in activities outside the home.

Deprivation of contact can have a significant impact on a person's mental health and well-being, leading to feelings of loneliness, social isolation, and a loss of connection to others. It can also make it difficult for the person to seek help or support, as they may feel that they have no one to turn to or that they are entirely dependent on the abuser.

It is important to recognize deprivation of contact as a form of abuse and to seek help and support if you or someone you know is experiencing it. This can involve reaching out to a trusted friend or family member, seeking help from a mental health professional or social worker, or contacting a local domestic violence or abuse hotline for support and resources.

Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse involves the use of verbal and non-verbal behaviors to control, manipulate, or harm another person's emotional well-being. This can include insults, threats, intimidation, belittling, and other forms of negative communication that can leave the victim feeling powerless and diminished.

Emotional abuse can take many forms, including gaslighting (making the victim question their own perceptions and reality), using criticism and put-downs to undermine the victim's self-esteem, controlling the victim's behavior, limiting their freedom or choices, and withholding love, support, or affection.

Emotional abuse can have a significant impact on the victim's mental health and well-being, leading to feelings of anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and a loss of trust in others. It can also make it difficult for the victim to recognize the abuse or seek help, as the abuser may have convinced them that they are at fault or that the abuse is not as serious as it appears.

It is important to recognize emotional abuse as a form of abuse and to seek help and support if you or someone you know is experiencing it. This can involve reaching out to a mental health professional, contacting a domestic violence or abuse hotline, or seeking support from friends and family.

Harassment

Harassment involves repeated and unwanted behaviors or communications that are intended to intimidate, humiliate, or control another person. It can occur in many contexts, including in the workplace, at school, in public spaces, or in personal relationships.

Examples of harassment may include unwanted physical contact or touching, making sexual or suggestive comments, sending unwanted messages or emails, stalking, and using threats or intimidation to control or

manipulate another person. Harassment can also take the form of cyberbullying or online harassment, where an individual uses social media or other digital platforms to harass, intimidate or threaten another person.

Harassment can have significant and lasting effects on the victim's mental health and well-being, causing feelings of fear, anxiety, and depression, and leading to a loss of confidence and self-esteem. It can also impact the victim's personal and professional relationships and make it difficult for them to feel safe or secure in their daily life.

It is important to recognize harassment as a form of abuse and to seek help and support if you or someone you know is experiencing it. This may involve reporting the harassment to a supervisor, teacher, or other authority figure, contacting a harassment helpline or advocacy group, or seeking help from a mental health professional.

Humiliation

The intentional and deliberate act of causing someone to feel ashamed or embarrassed. It can take many forms, including making fun of someone, belittling them, insulting them, or embarrassing them in front of others.

Humiliation can occur in a variety of contexts, such as in personal relationships, the workplace, or in public spaces. It can have a significant impact on the victim's mental health and well-being, causing feelings of shame, anxiety, and depression, and leading to a loss of self-esteem and confidence.

Humiliation can also be a tactic used in other forms of abuse, such as emotional or verbal abuse, where an abuser may use humiliation to control or manipulate the victim. It can also occur in instances of bullying or cyberbullying, where an individual may use humiliation to exert power over another person.

It is important to recognize humiliation as a form of abuse and to seek help and support if you or someone you know is experiencing it. This may involve reaching out to a mental health professional, seeking support from friends and family, or contacting a domestic violence or abuse hotline for resources and assistance.

Intimidation

Intimidation is the use of threats, fear, or force to control or manipulate another person. It can take many forms, including physical, verbal, and emotional, and can occur in various contexts such as in personal relationships, the workplace, or in public spaces.

Examples of intimidation may include physical threats or violence, verbal threats or aggression, making someone feel afraid, or using coercion or manipulation to control their behavior. Intimidation can also take the form of cyberbullying or online harassment, where an individual may use social media or other digital platforms to intimidate or threaten another person.

Intimidation can have a significant impact on the victim's mental health and well-being, causing feelings of fear, anxiety, and depression, and leading to a loss of confidence and self-esteem. It can also make it difficult for the victim to feel safe or secure in their daily life, and may lead to them feeling isolated or alone.

It is important to recognize intimidation as a form of abuse and to seek help and support if you or someone you know is experiencing it. This may involve reporting the intimidation to a supervisor, teacher, or other authority figure, contacting a harassment helpline or advocacy group, or seeking help from a mental health professional.

Isolation

Limiting or controlling a person's access to others, including friends, family, and support networks. It can take many forms, including preventing someone from leaving the house or engaging in activities outside the home, controlling who they can see or talk to, or limiting their access to communication tools such as phones or the internet.

Isolation can occur in various contexts such as in personal relationships, the workplace, or in situations of elder abuse or child abuse. It can have a significant impact on the victim's mental health and well-being, causing feelings of loneliness, social isolation, and a loss of connection to others. It can also make it difficult for the victim to seek help or support, as they may feel that they have no one to turn to or that they are entirely dependent on the abuser.

Isolation can also be a tactic used in other forms of abuse, such as emotional or verbal abuse, where an abuser may use isolation to control or

manipulate the victim. Isolation can also occur in instances of bullying or cyberbullying, where an individual may use isolation to exert power over another person.

It is important to recognize isolation as a form of abuse and to seek help and support if you or someone you know is experiencing it. This may involve reaching out to a mental health professional, contacting a domestic violence or abuse hotline, or seeking support from friends and family.

Threats of harm

Threats of harm involves the use of threats or intimidation to control or manipulate another person. It can take many forms, including physical threats or violence, verbal threats, or threats of harm to someone or something the victim cares about.

Threats of harm can occur in various contexts, such as in personal relationships, the workplace, or in public spaces. It can have a significant impact on the victim's mental health and well-being, causing feelings of fear, anxiety, and depression, and leading to a loss of confidence and self-esteem. It can also make it difficult for the victim to feel safe or secure in their daily life.

Threats of harm can also be a tactic used in other forms of abuse, such as emotional or verbal abuse, where an abuser may use threats to control or manipulate the victim. Threats of harm can also occur in instances of bullying or cyberbullying, where an individual may use threats to exert power over another person.

It is important to recognise threats of harm as a form of abuse and to seek help and support if you or someone you know is experiencing it. This may involve reporting the threats to the appropriate authorities, contacting a domestic violence or abuse hotline for resources and assistance, or seeking help from a mental health professional.

Verbal abuse

The use of words, tone, and language to control, manipulate, or harm another person. It can take many forms, including yelling, insulting, belittling, and humiliating, and can occur in various contexts such as in personal relationships, the workplace, or in public spaces.

Verbal abuse can have a significant impact on the victim's mental health and well-being, causing feelings of anxiety, depression, and a loss of self-esteem. It can also impact the victim's personal and professional relationships and make it difficult for them to feel safe or secure in their daily life.

Verbal abuse can also be a tactic used in other forms of abuse, such as emotional abuse, where an abuser may use words to control or manipulate the victim. Verbal abuse can also occur in instances of bullying or cyberbullying, where an individual may use words to intimidate or humiliate another person.

It is important to recognize verbal abuse as a form of abuse and to seek help and support if you or someone you know is experiencing it. This may involve reaching out to a mental health professional, contacting a domestic violence or abuse hotline, or seeking support from friends and family.

Safeguarding of Adults Training

To address psychological abuse in health and social care, it is important to ensure that staff are trained in safeguarding adults at risk. Safeguarding training should include information on recognizing and responding to psychological abuse, as well as strategies for preventing it from occurring in the first place.

Safeguarding training should also include information on the relevant legislation, such as the Care Act 2014, and the policies and procedures that are in place to protect adults at risk. This includes guidance on reporting and responding to suspected abuse, as well as information on the support available for individuals who have experienced abuse.

It is important to have policies and procedures in place that address psychological abuse and to ensure that staff are aware of these policies and procedures. This includes having clear guidelines on what constitutes psychological abuse, how to recognize the signs and symptoms, and how to respond appropriately.

In addition to training and policies, it is important to create a culture of openness and transparency in health and social care settings. This includes encouraging individuals to speak out about any concerns they may have and ensuring that staff are approachable and responsive to feedback.

- [Learn Q's Safeguarding Adults Level 1](#) is an introductory course that provides a basic understanding of safeguarding vulnerable adults. It covers the concept of safeguarding, the importance of safeguarding, the legislation in place to protect vulnerable adults, the signs of abuse and how to avoid them, and how to respond when a vulnerable adult discloses they are being abused or neglected. This course is suitable for anyone who works with vulnerable adults, including managers, supervisors, employees, and volunteers at all levels.
- [Learn Q's Safeguarding Adults Level 2 course](#), on the other hand, is a more advanced course that builds on the knowledge gained in Level 1. It provides a more in-depth understanding of safeguarding, including recognizing abuse, the responsibilities of different safeguarding roles, effective communication, and how to handle concerns and incidents related to safeguarding. This course is designed for those with additional safeguarding responsibilities, such as those who work in hospitals, general practices, nursing homes, care homes, or domiciliary care, as well as in religious organizations and community organizations.

Overall, while both courses cover the essential knowledge and skills needed to safeguard vulnerable adults, [Safeguarding Adults Level 2](#) provides a more comprehensive and detailed understanding of safeguarding, which is important for those who have additional safeguarding responsibilities.

These courses are ideal for those who work in hospitals, general practices, nursing homes, care homes, domiciliary care, as well as in religious and community organizations. By completing this course, you will be better equipped to handle safeguarding concerns and to ensure the safety and well-being of vulnerable adults.

At Learn Q, we are committed to providing high-quality training that meets the needs of professionals across a range of industries. Our Safeguarding Adults courses are designed to provide you with the knowledge and skills you need to excel in your role and make a real difference in the lives of vulnerable adults. Sign up today and take the next step in your career!

Conclusion

Psychological abuse is a serious issue that can have devastating effects on individuals. It is important to recognize the common examples of psychological abuse, provide appropriate training to staff, and have policies and procedures in place to prevent and respond to this form of abuse.

By working together, health and social care providers can ensure that adults at risk are protected and supported, and that their needs and preferences are at the center of all decision-making.