

Adult Protective Services: Initial Investigation

Case Vignette: Caroline Johnson

Reason for Referral: Anonymous neighbor reports hearing the older adult's son Harold yelling and using abusive language to his mother. Neighbor thinks Harold has a drinking or drug problem. The neighbor reports that the older adult is 87, uses a wheelchair, and is quite frail.

When you make the initial visit, Mrs. Johnson is home alone and lets you in. The living room is messy with empty food containers and there are beer cans on the coffee table though it is only 11:00a.m.

Consider the following questions before moving on to the next paragraph:

1. What safety assessment observations are available to you, the worker? (Red Flags)
 2. What "gut reactions" are you experiencing?
 3. What verbal, physical, or general actions or rapport building communication will you engage in?
 4. Are you considering an alternative safety plan, if needed?
 5. What pre-visit safety planning activities might reduce risk in this situation?
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Mrs. Johnson says her son has gone out; she is not sure where. She states that no one else is home and casts an anxious glance toward the front door. She tells you that her son is "a good boy" but sometimes goes out and drinks a little too much. When that happens, she states that she stays in her room. She denies abuse even though she has a few bruises on her arms. She says she fell down.

Consider the following questions before moving on to the next paragraph:

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While you are speaking to her, the son, Harold, comes in the house carrying a brown paper bag, smelling of alcohol, and slightly slurring his words. He looks surprised and unhappy to see you. His initial reaction is to challenge your authority and your right to be in his home. His eyes are red and he appears agitated and threatened.

Consider the following questions before moving on to the next paragraph:

1. What safety assessment observations are available to you, the worker? (Red Flags)
 2. What "gut reactions" are you experiencing?
 3. What verbal, physical, or general actions or rapport building communication will you engage in? What adjustments might you make to your attitude, body language, listening, and communication style to try to calm the situation?
 4. Are you considering an alternative safety plan, if needed?
 5. What pre-visit safety planning activities might reduce risk in this situation?
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Harold removes a beer from the bag, opens it, takes a drink and tells Mrs. Johnson that "he is fed up with her going behind his back." He turns to you saying, "you have no business being in my home."

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He takes a step toward you and states, "I'm going to see to it that you get what's coming to you," and he grabs your wrist and twists it painfully. He is still standing in the doorway blocking your exit.

Consider the following questions:

1. What safety assessment observations are available to you, the worker? (Red Flags)
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