

# Who is a Vulnerable Adult?

Definitions vary in different settings and situations, and there is certainly no one, universal definition. Until recently it was simply defined as someone elderly or disabled. This is now outdated and fails to consider wider groups who may be vulnerable for other reasons either temporarily or indefinitely.

## Some Vulnerable Adult Definitions

A person who is 18 years of age or over, and who is or may be in need of community care services by reason of mental or other disability, age or illness and who is or may be unable to take care of him/herself, or unable to protect him/herself against significant harm or serious exploitation. *1997 Consultation "Who Decides" issued by the Lord Chancellor's Department.*

A person over the age of 18 person who is at risk of harm or who lacks the absolute *most basic* (as distinct from mid-level or typical level) human life skills. A vulnerable adult is unable, rather than unwilling, to properly learn or properly maintain these skills and is usually completely without, and unable to obtain, any family, friends, acquaintances or other assistive persons in their lives to offer education or assistance in these areas. *Wikipedia*

'Adult at risk': an adult at risk of abuse or neglect is defined as someone who has needs for care and support, who is experiencing, or at risk of, abuse or neglect and as a result of their care needs - is unable to protect themselves. *The Care Act 2014*

**Vulnerable adults or 'adults at risk' can fall victim to abuse, for example persuaded to enter a financial transaction, change a Will, take out Power of Attorney or get into debt which he or she hasn't or can't consent to.**

## Vulnerable Adults & Mental Capacity

They are not the same and shouldn't be confused. Just because someone is identified as a vulnerable adult it doesn't automatically mean they are lacking mental capacity. A vulnerable adult could be an elderly, frail person, who may struggle with day to day tasks around their home, and even have early onset dementia, but could still have mental capacity. Capacity is the ability to understand information, remember this information, use this information to make a decision, and communicate a decision.

## So, Who is a Vulnerable Adult Then?

**The following groups are considered vulnerable because they have/are:**

1. Elderly who are mentally or physically frail
2. Learning disabilities
3. Dementia - memory loss, difficulties with thinking, problem-solving or language
4. Mental health problems
5. Experienced a recent trauma - bereavement, divorce, attacked, loss of a job
6. Struggling with debt
7. Isolated or lonely
8. In an abusive relationship - under undue pressure or coercion
9. Cognitive impairment - result of an accident or illness (temporary or indefinite)
10. Physical disability and or a sensory impairment
11. Long-term chronic illness or health condition
12. Addictions or misuse alcohol or substances
13. Lacking financial independence, or homeless