CARD 5
Abuse and neglect — the categories
Abuse and neglect can take many forms and the distinction between them is not always clear. Neglect can lead to harms as significant as direct abuse. Within healthcare, neglect is the most serious form of abuse and in practical terms this toolkit treats neglect as a category of – frequently institutional – abuse.

Abuse involves the misuse of the power. When identifying if abuse has taken place, it is important to remember that intent is not the issue. The definition of abuse is not based on whether the perpetrator intended to harm the individual, but whether harm was caused, and its impact on the individual. The Care Act guidance identifies these types of abuse:

- Physical abuse – including assault, hitting, slapping, pushing, misuse of medication, restraint or inappropriate physical sanctions
- Domestic violence – including psychological, physical, sexual, financial, emotional abuse, and so-called ‘honour’ based violence
- Sexual abuse – including rape, indecent exposure, sexual harassment, inappropriate looking or touching, sexual teasing or innuendo, sexual photography, subjection to pornography or witnessing sexual acts, sexual assault or sexual acts to which the adult has not consented or was pressured into consenting
- Psychological abuse – including emotional abuse, threats of harm or abandonment, deprivation of contact, humiliation, blaming, controlling, intimidation, coercion, harassment, verbal abuse, cyber bullying, isolation or unreasonable and unjustified withdrawal of services or supportive networks
– Financial or material abuse – including theft, fraud, internet scamming, coercion in relation to an adult’s financial affairs or arrangements, including in connection with wills, property, inheritance or financial transactions, or the misuse or misappropriation of property, possessions or benefits
– Modern slavery – encompasses slavery, human trafficking, forced labour and domestic servitude
– Discriminatory abuse – including forms of harassment, slurs or similar treatment because of race, gender and gender identity, age, disability, sexual orientation or religion
– Organisational abuse – including neglect and poor care practice within an institution care setting such as a hospital or care home, or in one’s own home
– Neglect and acts of omission – including ignoring medical, emotional or physical care needs, failure to provide access to appropriate healthcare and support or educational services, the withholding of the necessities of life such as medication, adequate nutrition and heating
– Self-neglect – this covers a wide range of behaviour that involves neglecting to care for one’s personal hygiene, health or surroundings.

Abuse and neglect can amount to serious violations of an individual’s rights. Many acts of abuse are criminal offences and all adults are entitled to the full protection of the law. Where a crime has been committed, or is likely to be committed, it may be necessary to involve the police.