

Lemons are the least of my worries - Tip sheet

Topics: Buying a house with family members, elder abuse, child-rearing, aging, independence

Video format

This video has a Take 1 and Take 2 format to demonstrate that some conversations are so challenging that it can take more than one attempt to get it right. Dina who is in her 70s is buying a house with her son, Dimitri and his wife Leila who are expecting a child. Dina is concerned about having her own space and wants to talk about financial and caring responsibilities.



Commentary

Dimitri is trying to get to a meeting and sounds a bit impatient. It's possible that he is not fully viewing Dina as having separate needs and desires from himself. And it sounds like Dina may not be used to making these clear. Once the phone call ends Dina acknowledges that she doesn't feel listened to and that she feels anxious about what she wants to say.

What is Elder Abuse?

We live in a society that associates aging with decline. As a result older people often have less opportunities than the young. This can result in social norms where elder abuse is tolerated. Elder abuse is defined as any act which causes harm to an older person and is carried out by someone they know and trust. The abuse may be physical, social, financial, psychological or sexual and can include mistreatment and neglect. The highest abuse incidences reported are financial.

REFLECTION:

- 1. What are your responses to Dina and Dimitri's relationship. How do they communicate?**
- 2. How does this interaction reflect gender roles and attitudes to older people? general?**

Take 1

Dina tries to have a phone-call about her concerns with Dimitri who is getting ready for a meeting.

How is gender relevant?

Ageism plus gender inequality combine to make women more vulnerable to elder abuse than men. In general older women are far worse off financially than older men and are at increased risk of homelessness. This is due to a range of factors. Many women do part-time work or are out of the workforce altogether due to childrearing and caring responsibilities. Many also work in industries that are poorly paid. Additionally, maternity leave has not included superannuation.

Historically, childrearing and family have been central to many women's lives. For some older women there is great satisfaction attached to being a mother/grandmother. However, we should never make assumptions about the meaning of these roles in someone's life.

Assumptions about family roles, as well as appropriate lifestyles and choices for certain age groups can be used to limit women as individuals and minimise what their feelings and experiences may actually be. It is essential that we respect a person's experience, needs, desires and interests at any age.

Take 2 - Commentary

Dina and Dimitri make a time to sit down and discuss Dina's concerns and the practicalities involved in buying a house together. This conversation demonstrates that when family members really listen and take time to understand each other's perspective, it can affirm a loving relationship.

Breaking the conversation down

What Dina does:

- ▶ Expresses love for Dimitri
- ▶ Acknowledges that it's difficult for her to have this conversation
- ▶ Acknowledges the things they do well together and enjoy
- ▶ Clearly states what she can do and her boundaries
- ▶ Clearly states what her needs are

What Dimitri does:

- ▶ Listens to Dina without interrupting
- ▶ Expresses understanding of Dina's needs
- ▶ Emphasises common aims
- ▶ Acknowledges that Dina has had to fit in with other people her entire life
- ▶ Reassures Dina that the baby is his and Leila's responsibility, not Dina's
- ▶ Checks that Dina has expressed all her concerns
- ▶ Suggests that everything is done legally

Further reflection

There is a lack of affordable childcare options in society. But does this mean that grandparents should be carers if they don't want to be? Older people have widely differing family, social and cultural situations. While Dina is not struggling with homelessness her story is a common one. A respectful conversation with her son helps to ensure she will not be disadvantaged in the future.

FREE SUPPORT AND INFORMATION

- ▶ [WIRE](https://www.wire.org.au) - 1300 134 130
- ▶ [Seniors Rights Victoria](https://www.seniorsrights.org.au) -1300 368 821