



CASE STUDY 2: FACILITATORS GUIDANCE

ROLE OF THE FACILITATOR:

- **Decide whether to deliver a 60 minute (Question 1 only) or 120 minute session (all questions).**
- Encourage reflective discussion about exploitation, vulnerability, and safeguarding.
- Help practitioners recognise subtle signs of abuse in older adults.
- Support thinking around partnership working, trauma-informed practice, and building trust with reluctant adults.

CASE STUDY 2: JOHN – 60-MINUTE DELIVERY OPTION

This case study can be adapted for a 60-minute team discussion by concentrating on the early indicators of cuckooing and exploitation of older adults. Later safeguarding stages can be used in extended sessions.

Suggested structure:

- Read the initial case study overview.
- Focus on Question 1 and the first scenario stage (home environment, unknown visitors, changes in John's behaviour).

Group discussion:

- What visible indicators suggest cuckooing?
- How does fear and loss of control present in John's behaviour?
- What opportunities exist for earlier intervention?

Practice reflection:

- Who in our setting might notice these signs?
- What helps concerns be shared and acted on sooner?

Key learning focus for shorter sessions:

- Identifying observable warning signs
- Understanding how isolation and dependency increase susceptibility to cuckooing
- The importance of early, proportionate safeguarding responses



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QUESTION 1:

What are the key indicators that an older adult, like John, is being targeted for cuckooing? How can social workers identify these signs early?

READ THIS NEXT STAGE OF THE SCENARIO TO THE GROUP:

During your first home visit, you notice that John hesitates before letting you inside. He keeps glancing nervously over his shoulder, as though expecting someone to appear. Once inside, you see clear signs that other people have been staying there, several mattresses on the floor, piles of takeaway containers, and strong smells of smoke. John apologises repeatedly for the mess, saying he “hasn’t had time to tidy.”

As you speak with him, you hear movement in the back room. John stiffens and quickly says, “It’s nothing, don’t worry about it. They’re just friends... They won’t be long.”

He wrings his hands and avoids eye contact. His clothes are unwashed, and he appears thinner than in his last recorded contact.

Prompts to explore with the group:

- What indicators of cuckooing are visible in this stage?
- What behavioural signs suggest fear, coercion, or loss of control?
- What early-warning signs could have triggered earlier intervention?

Suggested facilitator points:

- Frequent unknown visitors, people living in the home, changes in routine, noise, and disruption are key signs.
- John’s anxiety, avoidance, deterioration in self-care, and deference to unseen individuals all signal coercion.
- Decline in health or home conditions may indicate loss of control due to exploitation.
- Regular welfare checks, neighbour reports, and routine contact with isolated older adults can support early identification.

Set aside 5 minutes at the end of the session to complete the [critical reflection survey](#).





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QUESTION 2:

How might John's isolation and fear have contributed to his vulnerability in this situation? What interventions could have been put in place earlier to reduce this risk?

READ THIS NEXT STAGE OF THE SCENARIO TO THE GROUP:

As you continue the conversation, John quietly admits, "It was nice at first... having company. They helped me with shopping. They were kind." His voice shakes as he adds, "But then things changed. They stay all the time now. They get angry if I ask questions. I... I don't want any trouble."

He explains that his phone has been taken "for safekeeping," and he sometimes goes without meals because "they use the kitchen a lot." He tries to laugh it off but becomes visibly distressed. He looks to the doorway several times, lowering his voice whenever he hears noise from inside.

When asked whether he has told anyone else what is happening, he says, "No... I don't want to bother people. And I don't want them to find out I said anything."

Prompts to explore with the group:

- How did isolation make John more vulnerable to grooming and exploitation?
- Where are the opportunities for earlier intervention?
- What might have helped reduce risk before the situation escalated?

Suggested facilitator points:

- Social isolation creates emotional and practical vulnerability, older adults may welcome attention or help.
- Fear, dependence and shame can prevent individuals from seeking support.
- Proactive community outreach, befriending services, regular check-ins, or support from local voluntary groups could have provided protective connections.
- Awareness training for neighbours, housing providers, and community professionals helps flag early concerns.





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QUESTION 3:

What specific safeguarding steps should have been taken once it was identified that John was being coerced into allowing criminals to use his home for illegal activities?

READ THIS NEXT STAGE OF THE SCENARIO TO THE GROUP:

While you speak with John, one of the young men enters the room abruptly. He stands behind John with crossed arms, staring at you without speaking. John immediately shrinks back and mutters, “Everything’s fine, we were just chatting. He’s just leaving.”

The man stays in the doorway, watching until you wrap up the conversation. John avoids speaking further and keeps giving apologetic looks. As you leave, you see several other unfamiliar young men entering the house, carrying bags.

Neighbours later report that the property has become even busier in the evenings, with people arriving by car and leaving quickly.

Prompts to explore with the group:

- What safeguarding actions are immediately required for John’s safety?
- How do you manage risks of retaliation or escalation?
- Who needs to be involved in a multi-agency response?

Suggested facilitator points:

- Immediate partnership with the Police to ensure safe removal of perpetrators and secure the property.
- A safeguarding plan should include risk assessment, mental-health support, and measures to stop re-entry (e.g., injunctions, target-hardening, property management support).
- John may require safe accommodation if returning home is unsafe.
- Follow-up welfare visits, medical reviews, and emotional support are essential.





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QUESTION 4:

How can social workers build trust with John, who may be hesitant to disclose the full extent of his exploitation due to fear or embarrassment?

READ THE FINAL STAGE OF THE SCENARIO TO THE GROUP:

Once the perpetrators have been removed temporarily, you meet John again. He appears embarrassed and repeatedly apologises for “letting things get out of hand.” He insists he “should have known better” and worries that people will judge him for being “stupid enough” to let strangers take over his home.

When you gently ask what he wants to happen next, he pauses and says, “I just want my home back. I want to feel safe again.” He becomes emotional when describing the fear he felt and says, “I didn’t tell anyone because I thought they’d hurt me... or think I was making a fuss.”

Prompts to explore with the group:

- How do you build rapport with an adult who feels ashamed or fearful?
- What communication approaches help reduce guilt and self-blame?
- How do you create an environment where John can share safely over time?

Suggested facilitator points:

- A non-judgmental, patient approach helps reduce shame and builds trust gradually.
- Validate feelings and normalise vulnerability, older adults are often targeted precisely because they are isolated.
- Avoid pressure; use open-ended questions and allow John to guide the conversation.
- Emphasise that he has rights, choices, and support.
- Ongoing contact, consistent workers, and emotional reassurance are key to long-term engagement.

Set aside 5 minutes at the end of the session to complete the [critical reflection survey](#).

