

All About Home Takeovers

Home should always be a safe space – a place you can count on to seek refuge and where you feel secure and protected.

But, for people experiencing a “home takeover,” this is not the case. And the space that should feel safe and secure becomes a place where the resident feels in danger, scared, or threatened.

A home takeover occurs when a vulnerable homeowner or tenant is forced to accommodate an unwanted guest in their home.

The perpetrator of a home takeover could be a relative, friend, or acquaintance of the home’s legitimate occupant. They may have initially been invited to stay over – often to fulfill a personal, social, or economic need of the occupant. For example, an older adult may allow someone to stay in their home to help with household expenses, such as rent or food. Perhaps, they allowed the person to stay over because they were lonely or felt isolated. Other factors that might contribute to the occupant’s vulnerability to a home takeover include empathy for the perpetrator’s situation or pressure to house the perpetrator.

No matter what the initial reason may be, the invited guest eventually “takes over” the home. The situation becomes a home takeover when the perpetrator refuses to leave, and their actions or activities make the occupant feel unsafe or threatened. In other words, the home no longer feels like a safe space.

Threats, guilt, violence, manipulation, or financial exploitation are among the reasons the legitimate occupant of a home may accommodate the perpetrator of a home takeover.

There are many impacts of a home takeover.

They can include loss of control within the home, destruction of the home or property, disruption of the neighbourhood, or eviction. Eviction can be devastating to a vulnerable tenant, particularly if they lose their place in community housing.

For children, the home and neighbourhood are fundamental for healthy growth and development, including mental health. Many homeowners or tenants may find they cannot avoid or escape the perpetrator due to a lack of supports or resources.

For the past three years, Grey Bruce Public Health has worked with community partners to examine and develop strategies to address the emerging issue of home takeovers. This multi-sectoral collaboration set out to investigate the prevalence of home takeovers locally, understand the current response to home takeovers and gaps in that response, raise awareness of the issue, and create a framework to help guide community partners’ responses to home takeovers.

Resources are available on GBPH’s website under the Your Environment drop-down menu and Healthy Housing, Home Takeover. A 10-question checklist, entitled “*Welcomed Guest or Home Takeover?*,” is available to help homeowners or tenants determine if they are experiencing (or at risk of experiencing) a home takeover.

It is important to protect your home and reach out for support when needed. Targets of a home takeover are encouraged to talk to someone they trust, such as a support worker, landlord, family member, neighbour or friend. Not sure who to call? Call or text 211.

Lisa Alguire is a Public Health Nurse with Grey Bruce Public Health.

Grey Bruce Public Health is represented on the Hanover Age-Friendly Committee (which was created in 2017) in response to one of the stated priorities of the Town of Hanover’s Strategic Plan in 2010. The planners identified the need to consult with older adults to determine social and recreational needs, improve accessibility, and how best to make Hanover an age-friendly community.