

What You May Need to Know About Elder Abuse

Learn how to help spot elder abuse and tips for elder abuse prevention.

Elder abuse is a difficult topic to think about, especially if you're a caregiver to an aging family member or friend. But knowing what to look for and how you can help may allow you to keep the person you're caring for safe. By equipping yourself with this knowledge, you may also help to stop elder abuse in your community, too.

Elder Abuse: A Definition

We continue to learn more about elder abuse, so there isn't one universal definition. Elder abuse can happen in care facilities or in people's homes.

The Department of Justice lists five types of elder abuse:

- Caregiver Neglect
- Financial Fraud & Exploitation
- Psychological Abuse
- Sexual Abuse
- Physical Abuse

Troubling Statistics

Reports of elder abuse are on the rise. The Department of Justice reports that at least 10% of adults 65 and older experience some form of elder abuse every year. Most abuse victims are women. Other factors that can put people at risk include having memory problems like dementia, or a lack of family and friends nearby.

Effects of Abuse

The National Council on Aging (NCA) reports that elders who have been abused have a 300% higher risk of death compared to those who have not been mistreated. According to the NCA, elder abuse costs older Americans as much as \$36.5 billion annually.

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Signs of Elder Abuse

As a caregiver, you can help watch for elder abuse with the person you're caring for and also in your community. Look for the following signs of abuse when visiting an older person at home or in a care facility:

- Has trouble sleeping
- Seems depressed or confused
- Loses weight for no reason
- Displays signs of trauma, like rocking back and forth
- Acts agitated or violent
- Becomes withdrawn
- Stops taking part in activities he or she enjoys
- Has unexplained bruises, burns or scars
- Looks messy, with unwashed hair or dirty clothes
- Develops bed sores or other preventable conditions

Where to Get Help

If you suspect elder abuse of any kind, talk with them to express your worries or concerns. They may be afraid to speak up about mistreatment or worry that if they report it, it will make the situation worse.

If you think someone is in urgent danger, call 911 or your local police. If the situation is not immediately life-threatening, anyone who suspects the mistreatment of an older person should contact their local Adult Protective Services office or call the Eldercare Locator weekdays at 1-800-677-1116.

Sources:

U.S. Department of Justice:

<https://www.justice.gov/elderjustice>

CDC: Elder abuse surveillance report

https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/ea_book_revised_2016.pdf

U.S. Department of Justice: Elder abuse statistics

<https://www.justice.gov/file/1098056/download>

National Institute on Aging: Elder abuse

<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/elder-abuse>

National Council on Aging: Elder abuse facts

<https://www.ncoa.org/public-policy-action/elder-justice/elder-abuse-facts/>

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