



Types & Signs of Elder Abuse

Elder abuse and neglect are things no one wants to think of as happening to a loved one, but they are far more common than you might think. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, elder abuse is an intentional act, or failure to act, by a caregiver or another person in a relationship involving expectation or trust that causes or creates a risk of harm to an older adult. Types of abuse come in many forms and are not always characterized by physical signs.

While anyone can be affected by abuse, people with disabilities are more likely to experience abuse than people without disabilities, especially older adults with disabilities. This article provides information on the most common types of elder abuse, warning signs of elder abuse, how to help prevent and report abuse, and why people with disabilities face additional barriers when seeking help.

Types of Elder Abuse

Physical – Physical elder abuse is the use of physical force that results in physical injury, pain, impairment, or death. It can be accidental or intentional and includes, but is not limited to: striking, beating, shoving, pushing, shaking, suffocation, and the inappropriate use of drugs or restraints.

Sexual – Sexual elder abuse is contact with a person without their consent. This type of abuse includes physical sexual contact, as well as forcing people to view pornographic materials, watch sexual acts, or forcing the elder to undress. These acts qualify as sexual abuse if they are committed against a person who is unable to give consent.

Emotional – Emotional elder abuse is behavior that causes emotional or psychological pain, fear, or distress. Examples of this type of abuse include behaviors intended to humiliate, intimidate, isolate, or control. Name calling, seclusion from family or friends, or constant blaming are types of emotional elder abuse.

Neglect – Elder neglect is failure by a caregiver or caretaker to fulfill obligations that are necessary for the wellbeing of a person. Failure to meet needs for medical care, hygiene, nutrition, clothing, or basic activities of daily living all classify as elder neglect. These actions, while intentional or unintentional, result in the same negative consequences on the older adult.

Financial Abuse or Exploitation – Elder financial abuse or exploitation is the unauthorized use of a person's financial means, either by a trusted source such as a caregiver, or an outside scam artist. This type of abuse includes misusing credit cards or checks, stealing cash or other valuables, the inappropriate use of income checks or personal benefits, resources, or assets.

Healthcare Fraud and Abuse – Healthcare fraud and abuse is when unethical healthcare providers charge for healthcare, but do not provide a service. They may overcharge for medical care services, prescribe too much or too little medication, recommend unnecessary or fraudulent medical services, or commit Medicaid fraud.

Warning Signs of Elder Abuse

Sometimes, warning signs of elder abuse may go unrecognized because they are dismissed as dementia or behaviors that may be associated with “normal” signs of aging. Although personality changes could be account for some of these aging signs, these changes can also be a telltale sign of abuse. Check out some of these warning signs:



Physical

- Broken bones, sprains, or bruises
- Drug overdose or refusal to take

Medication

- Broken eyeglasses
- Poor hygiene
- Untreated Bedsores

Sexual

- Bruising around genitals
- Unexplained anal or vaginal bleeding

Emotional

- Dementia-like behavior
- Threatening or controlling behavior

Neglect

- Unexplained, sudden weight loss
- Unsanitary living conditions
- Inappropriate clothing, especially for the weather

Financial Abuse or Exploitation

- Significant, unusual withdrawals from elder’s accounts
- Suspicious changes in wills or other legal documents
- Sudden changes in the elder’s financial situation

Healthcare Fraud and Abuse

- Multiple charges for the same service, or duplicate charges
- Overmedicating or undermedicating as prescribed by a healthcare provider
- Poorly trained staff at medical facilities or inadequate facilities

Disability and Elder Abuse

According to the Justice Department, 10 percent of seniors are abused each year and only about 1 in 23 are reported. This type of abuse most commonly affects women and people with intellectual and physical disabilities, because they are viewed as a more vulnerable population and are unwilling or unable to report.

Older adults with disabilities are more likely to experience abuse than people without disabilities for a number of reasons. Caregivers sometimes prey on older people and people with disabilities because they are viewed as “weak”, “easy targets”, or are devalued as vital societal members. This is a terrible stereotype that has no truth in it and only perpetuates the stigma people with disabilities still face. Older people and people with disabilities are no different or less capable than younger people or people without disabilities. Another reason older people with disabilities experience abuse at much higher rates is because of the additional barriers that are faced when seeking help. Transportation issues and social isolation make it more difficult for older people with disabilities to stay connected to their communities, therefore making it more difficult to stay engaged and report abuse if it occurs.



How to Prevent & Report Elder Abuse

Elder abuse often happens by caregivers in assisted living and nursing facilities, largely due to burnout and understaffing. If these facilities are understaffed, more pressure is put on employees to care for more patients or work overtime to compensate. Neglect can occur and residents are less likely to receive the type of care necessary for them to have a good quality of life. Although nursing and assisted living facilities are the most common location for abuse, abuse can still occur in residential settings. Caregivers who have extreme financial, psychological, and physical issues may take their frustrations out on the people they are responsible for taking care of.

If you are a caregiver and feel overwhelmed with responsibilities, take a breather and seek out resources to help you cope. Social support services for caretakers are available and can help prevent abuse. Request help from friends or family, take care of yourself, seek help if you are depressed or experiencing substance abuse, and be sure to get enough rest.

Elders who are being abused, exploited, or neglected should report abuse to a trusted source, such as a doctor, family member, or friend. Many elders don't report abuse for fear of retaliation by their abuser or because they blame themselves. In order to stop abuse, it must be reported at the first sign.

If you or a loved one is experiencing elder abuse, contact the **National Center on Elder Abuse at 1-800-677-1116**.

Resources:

<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/elderabuse/definitions.html>

<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/abuse/elder-abuse-and-neglect.htm>