

Elder Abuse

What is Elder Abuse?

In general, elder abuse refers to intentional or neglectful acts by a caregiver or "trusted" individual that lead to or may lead to harm of a vulnerable older adult.

Types of Abuse:

- **Physical Abuse** - Is the use of force causing harm or pain to an individual, which includes but not limited to hitting, kicking, pinching, slapping, shoving, shaking, and burning. Other forms of physical abuse involve the inappropriate use of medication or physical restraints.
- **Financial Abuse/Exploitation** - Involves wrongfully taking or using a vulnerable older adult's funds or property through theft, scams, fraud, or predatory lending.
- **Psychological Abuse** - Causing emotional pain through verbal assaults, threats, or harassment. Perpetrators intimidate, humiliate, or attempt to isolate their victims.
- **Sexual Abuse** - Is non-consensual sexual contact of any kind including, contact with an individual unable to consent to such contact - for instance, if they suffer from dementia and are unable to understand.
- **Neglect** - Is an individual failing or refusing to meet the needs of a vulnerable older adult who is under their care. This includes not providing essential things a person needs, such as food, water, shelter, clothing, or personal hygiene.
- **Self-Neglect** - Involves failure of a person to meet vital self care needs, putting them at risk of harm for their safety and/or health.

Red Flags:

- **Physical/Sexual Abuse** - inadequately explained cuts, wounds, sores, bruises, welts, burns, or fractures; undernourished; dehydrated; unexplained sexually transmitted diseases
- **Financial Abuse/Exploitation** - unusual bank account activity; change in spending habits; unpaid bills; vulnerable older adult has signed property transfers (Power of Attorney, new will, etc.) but is unable to comprehend the transaction or what it means; caregiver has control of vulnerable older adult's money but is failing to provide for vulnerable adult's needs
- **Psychological Abuse** - unexplained or uncharacteristic changes in behavior, such as withdrawal from normal activities; confusion; anger; depression; fear; helplessness; shame; caregiver isolates vulnerable older adult; caregiver is verbally aggressive or demeaning, controlling, or uncaring
- **Neglect/Self-Neglect** - lack of basic hygiene, adequate food, or clean and appropriate clothing; untreated medical condition; lack of medical aids (glasses, walker, hearing aids, medications); person with dementia left unsupervised; person confined to bed left without care; home cluttered, filthy, containing safety hazards, lacking adequate amenities (stove, refrigerator, heat, cooling, working plumbing and electricity); untreated pressure sores

To report suspected abuse or to get help...

In the community:

- Call 1-800-91-PREVENT (917-7383); or,
- Contact the Local Adult Protective Services (http://www.dhr.state.md.us/blog/?page_id=4531)

In Nursing Homes or Assisted Living Facilities:

- Contact the Long Term Care Ombudsman (<http://aging.maryland.gov/egov/Documents/OmbudsmanLocation.pdf>); or,
- Contact the DHMH Office of Health Care Quality (<http://dhmh.maryland.gov/ohcq/SitePages/Home.aspx>)

Remember: You do not need to prove that abuse is occurring; it is up to the professionals to investigate the suspicions; many cases of abuse go undetected, please do not assume that someone has already reported a suspicious situation.