



# WORLD ELDER ABUSE AWARENESS DAY

Building Strong Support for Elders

## ELDER ABUSE, NEGLECT, AND EXPLOITATION

TOGETHER, WE CAN PREVENT ELDER

# DO YOU KNOW?

## What Is Elder Abuse?

Elder abuse refers to intentional or negligent acts by a caregiver or trusted individual that causes harm to an older person. Elder abuse takes many forms, including:

- **Neglect:** Failing to provide the necessities of life, such as medication, shelter and food.
- **Physical abuse:** Inflicting pain or injury by hitting, slapping, pushing or using restraints.
- **Sexual abuse:** Any sexual activity for which the person has not consented.
- **Emotional abuse (including verbal and non-verbal abuse and threats):** Using threats, humiliation or harassment causing distress and intimidation.
- **Financial abuse and exploitation:** Misusing or withholding money, property or other assets unauthorized, illegally or improperly.

## Why Should We Care About Elder Abuse?

Every year an estimated **5 million** or **1 in 10** older Americans experience elder abuse, neglect, or exploitation. Experts believe that for every case reported for elder abuse, as many as **23.5** cases go unreported.

Whether it is in the community or in a long-term care facility, working together, we can build social supports that can prevent this abuse and keep everyone safe as we age.



It can often be difficult to stay involved with and connected to our communities as we age. As a result, older people are more likely to experience social isolation, which increases the likelihood of abuse and neglect.

Elder abuse can happen to anyone – a loved one, a neighbor, and when we are old enough, it can even happen to us. Elder abuse affects older people across all socioeconomic groups, cultures, and races.

### ELDER ABUSE CAN OCCUR ANYWHERE:

- In a person's own home
- In nursing homes, assisted living facilities, and other institutional settings
- In hospitals

While any older person is potentially at risk of elder abuse, some are more susceptible to experience abuse or neglect than others. Based on available information, women and people 80 and older are more likely to experience abuse. Factors such as dementia or poor physical health can increase older people's isolation, which in turn puts people at greater risk of experiencing abuse or neglect.

## Why Does Elder Abuse Remain Such an "Invisible" Problem?

Like other forms of interpersonal violence, elder abuse usually occurs behind closed doors.

Many people who experience elder abuse are *reluctant to report* abuse because they may:

- Feel ashamed and embarrassed, particularly if a family member is the perpetrator
- Be afraid that the perpetrator will get in trouble
- Worry that they will be forced to live in a nursing home—and this sometimes happens
- Feel guilty or somehow to blame
- Be in denial that the abuse is occurring, or unaware that what they are experiencing is abuse or neglect
- Be afraid that if they report, the abuse will get worse

Some people who experience elder abuse may also be *unable to speak out* due to dementia or other impairments, or may not be believed when they do.

There are also indications that a culture of *ageism (biases against aging) and a fear of growing old* may keep older people marginalized and undervalued in our society, therefore many problems as we age remain invisible or are viewed as unimportant.

## What are the signs of abuse?

Be aware of the signs of elder abuse and watch for them. Even if you are not sure, it is best to err on the side of caution and follow up on any suspicion of elder abuse.

### Signs of emotional/psychological abuse:

- fear
- depression or low mood
- confusion
- loneliness
- feeling of helplessness

### Signs of neglect

- an older person who is hungry, thirsty or has lost a lot of weight
- an older person who is wearing the wrong clothing for the weather conditions
- an older person who is living in an environment that is dirty or unsafe
- an older person whose health problems have worsened due to their medications being mismanaged
- an older person with unexplained bruises or conditions such as hypothermia, dehydration or pressure sores

## Signs of physical abuse

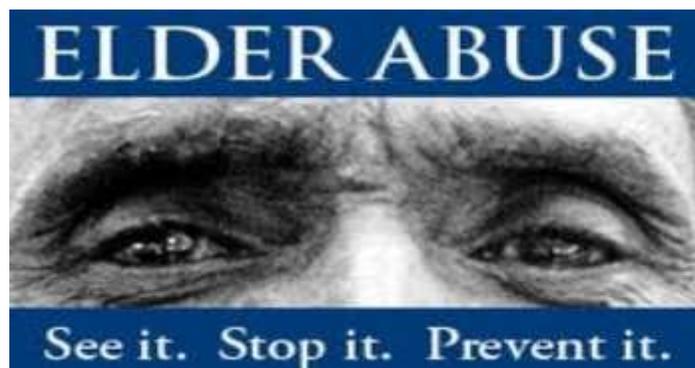
- pain or restricted movement
- bruises, bite marks, cuts, burns, scratches
- unexplained accidents
- unexplained injuries such as broken bones, sprains, punctures
- over or under-use of sedation
- fear or anxiety
- stories about injuries that conflict between the older person and others

## Signs of sexual abuse

- non-consensual sexual contact, language or behavior
- inappropriate touching
- sexual assault
- rough or inappropriate cleaning or treatment of an older person's genital area
- viewing sexually explicit material or making sexually explicit phone calls in the presence of an older person without their consent

## Signs of financial abuse

- missing belongings
- inability to find the money for basics such as food, clothing, transport costs and bills
- large withdrawals or big changes in banking habits or activities
- property transfers when the person is no longer able to manage their own financial affairs
- fear, stress and anxiety



## Reporting Elder Abuse

Each state has its own reporting requirements, and many professionals who work closely with older people are “mandatory reporters” by state statute. You may wish to look up who in your state is designated by state statute as a mandated reporter.

It is up to everyone to prevent and address elder abuse. Report suspected mistreatment to your local adult protective services, long-term care ombudsman or law enforcement agency who can investigate the situation.

You can report elder abuse to Programs such as Adult Protective Services (APS) and the Long-Term Care Ombudsmen.

**If you believe that, an older person is in a life-threatening situation, contact 911 or the local police or sheriff’s department.**

***No one deserves to be abused.***



### **To find More Information**

Visit the website of the National Center on Elder Abuse (NCEA) at <https://ncea.acl.gov>, or contact the Regional Long Term Care Ombudsman by phone: 803.774.1983 or email: [sbrooks@slcog.org](mailto:sbrooks@slcog.org).



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