

Protecting Yourself from Violence and Abuse



Violence and abuse affect all kinds of people every day. It doesn't matter what race or culture you come from, how much money you have, or if you have a disability. It is most common among women between ages 15 and 54, but it can happen at any age. Learn more about how to recognize the signs of violence and abuse. Learn how to stay safe. If you are being abused or have a loved one who is abused, or *think* there is abuse, get help as soon as you can. Remember, abuse can be physical, mental, and emotional.

The Most Common Forms of Violence

Domestic violence and abuse. It is also called intimate partner violence, partner abuse, spouse abuse, or battering. It occurs when one person uses force to inflict injury — either emotional or physical — on another person they have, or had, a relationship with. It occurs between spouses and partners, parents and children, children and grandparents, and brothers and sisters. Victims can be any age, race, or gender.

Often, the violent person is a husband, former husband, boyfriend, or ex-boyfriend. But sometimes the abuser is female. Domestic violence and abuse are common and must be taken *very seriously*.

Forms of domestic violence and abuse include

- ◆ physical abuse
- ◆ psychological or emotional abuse
- ◆ sexual assault
- ◆ isolation
- ◆ controlling all of the victim's money, shelter, time, food, etc.

Sexual assault and abuse. It is any type of sexual activity that you do not agree to. Sexual assault can be verbal, visual, or anything that forces a person to join in unwanted sexual contact or attention. Rape is a common form of sexual assault. It is committed in many situations—on a date, by a friend or an acquaintance, or by a stranger.



Examples of sexual assault and abuse include

- ◆ inappropriate touching
- ◆ vaginal, anal, or oral penetration
- ◆ sexual intercourse that you say “NO” to
- ◆ rape
- ◆ attempted rape
- ◆ child molestation
- ◆ voyeurism, when someone watches private sexual acts
- ◆ exhibitionism, when someone exposes himself or herself in public
- ◆ incest, which is sexual contact between family members
- ◆ sexual harassment, whether it occurs by a stranger, in the workplace, on a date, or in the home by someone you know

Educate yourself on “date rape” drugs. They can be slipped into a drink when you’re not looking. Never leave your drink unattend-

ed—no matter where you are. Always be aware of your surroundings. Date rape drugs make a person unable to resist assault and have memory loss of the event.

Signs You Are Being Abused

If someone you love, live with, or had a relationship with does any of these things to you, it’s time to get help.

- Monitors what you’re doing all the time.
- Criticizes you for little things.
- Constantly accuses you of being unfaithful.
- Prevents or discourages you from seeing friends or family, or going to work or school.
- Gets angry when he or she is drinking alcohol or using drugs.
- Controls how you spend your money.
- Controls your use of medicines you need.
- Humiliates you in front of others.
- Destroys your property or things that you care about.
- Threatens to hurt you, the children, or pets.
- Causes harm by hitting, beating, pushing, shoving, punching, slapping, kicking, or biting.
- Uses or threatens to use a weapon against you.
- Forces you to have sex against your will.
- Blames you for his or her violent outbursts.

Elder abuse. This abuse occurs when a caregiver, family member, or others use power and control to inflict physical, sexual, emotional, or financial injury or harm on vulnerable adults in their care. Many victims are people who are older and frail and depend on others to meet their needs. It can happen to women and men. It can affect people of all ethnic backgrounds and social status. Family members of the victim are responsible for most cases of elder abuse.



Types of elder abuse are

- ◆ physical abuse
- ◆ emotional abuse

- ◆ sexual abuse
- ◆ exploitation
- ◆ neglect
- ◆ abandonment

Signs of Elder Abuse

Type of Elder Abuse	Signs and Symptoms Include, But Are Not Limited To, the Following:
<p>Physical abuse: Inflicting, or threatening to inflict, physical pain or injury on a vulnerable elder, or depriving them of a basic need</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bruises, black eyes, welts, lacerations, and rope marks from being restrained • Bone fractures, broken bones, and skull fractures • Open wounds, cuts, punctures, and untreated injuries • Sprains, dislocations, internal injuries, and internal bleeding • Broken eyeglasses or frames, or physical signs of being subjected to punishment • Laboratory findings of medication overdose or the under-use of prescribed medications • An elder’s report of being hit, slapped, kicked, or mistreated • An elder’s sudden change in behavior • An elder who does not want to be alone with caregiver • The caregiver’s refusal to allow visitors to see an elder alone • Changes in speaking, breathing, or swallowing that may be the result of strangulation

Type of Elder Abuse	Signs and Symptoms Include, But Are Not Limited To, the Following:
<p>Sexual abuse: Any sexual contact that is not agreed to by the elder, like unwanted touching and all types of sexual assault</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bruises around the breasts or genital area • Unexplained sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) or genital infections • Unexplained vaginal or anal bleeding • Torn, stained, or bloody underclothing • An elder’s report of being sexually assaulted or raped
<p>Emotional abuse: Inflicting mental pain, anguish, or distress on an elder person through verbal or nonverbal acts</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being emotionally upset or agitated • Being extremely withdrawn and non-communicative or non-responsive • Unusual behavior, usually thought to be caused by dementia (for example, sucking, biting, rocking) • An elder’s report of being verbally or emotionally mistreated • Isolation: Family members and friends may be cut off from the victim because the abuser refuses to allow contact with the elder or relay information to the elder. • Psychological abuse is a strong indicator that other forms of abuse are also occurring.
<p>Exploitation: Illegal taking, misuse, or concealment of funds, property, or assets of a vulnerable elder</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sudden changes in bank account or banking practice • Unexplained withdrawal of large sums of money by a person accompanying the elder • Including additional names on an elder’s bank signature card • Abrupt changes in a will or other financial documents • Unexplained disappearance of funds or valuable possessions • Substandard care being provided or bills unpaid despite adequate financial resources • Discovery of an elder’s signature being forged • An elder’s report of financial exploitation

Type of Elder Abuse	Signs and Symptoms Include, But Are Not Limited To, the Following:
<p>Neglect: Refusal or failure by those responsible to provide food, shelter, health care, financial care, or protection for a vulnerable elder</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dehydration, malnutrition, untreated bed sores, and poor personal hygiene • Unattended or untreated health problems • Hazardous or unsafe living conditions: improper wiring, no heat, or no running water • Unsanitary and unclean living conditions: dirt, fleas or lice on the person, soiled bedding, fecal and urine smells, inadequate clothing • An elder's report of being mistreated
<p>Abandonment: The desertion of a vulnerable elder by anyone who has assumed the responsibility for care or custody of that person</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The desertion of an elder at a hospital, a nursing facility, a shopping center, or other public place • An elder's own report of being abandoned

Steps to Get Help for Elder Abuse

Each one of us has a responsibility to keep vulnerable elders safe from harm. Every case of elder abuse should be reported.

Legislators in all 50 states have passed some form of laws on the issue of elder abuse. These laws vary greatly from state to state. But all states have set up reporting systems. Adult Protective Services (APS) agencies receive and investigate reports of suspected elder abuse. They screen calls for potential seriousness. It keeps all information confi-

dential. If the agency decides the situation might be violating the state's laws, it assigns a caseworker to conduct an investigation (in cases of an emergency, usually within 24 hours). If the victim needs crisis intervention, services are available.

- ◆ Call the police or 911 immediately if someone you know is in immediate, life-threatening danger!
- ◆ If the danger is not immediate, but you suspect that abuse has occurred or is occurring, report your suspicions to the local APS agency.



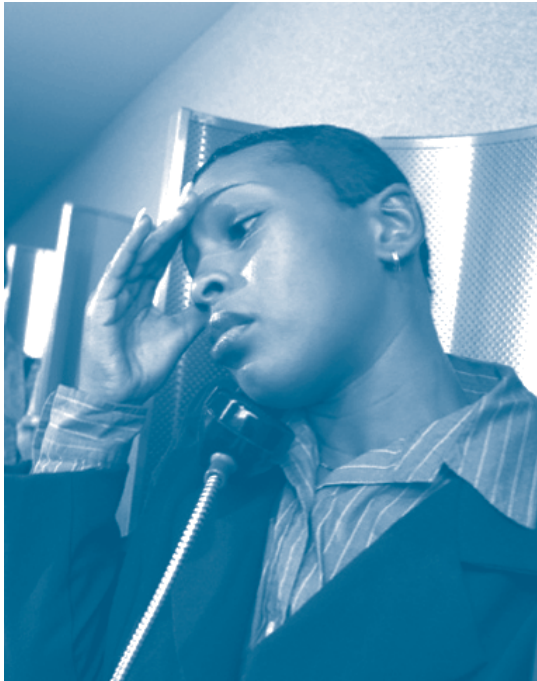
- ◆ If you cannot find the telephone number for your state's Adult Protective Services hotline, **call the Eldercare Locator helpline at 1-800-677-1116**. Specially trained operators will refer you to a local agency that can help you. The helpline is open Mondays–Fridays, 9 a.m.–8 p.m., Eastern Standard Time.
- ◆ To report elder abuse, call Adult Protective Services through your state's hotline. For a state-by-state listing of statewide toll-free telephone numbers, go to the web site of the National Center on Elder Abuse at **www.elderabusecenter.org/default.cfm?p=statehotlines.cfm**.
- ◆ If the suspected incident of elder abuse involves an older person living in an insti-

tutional setting, call the office of the local long-term care (LTC) ombudsman. Go to the web site of the National Center on Elder Abuse at www.elderabusecenter.org/default.cfm?p=nursinghomeabuse.cfm. You'll find a directory of state hotlines for reporting abuse in nursing homes, assisted living, or board and care homes. You'll also find many other resources there to help you report suspected abuse.

Steps to Get Help for Domestic Violence and Abuse

You're not alone. Many women are victims of domestic abuse.

- ◆ If you are abused or have a loved one who is abused, get help.
- ◆ **Call a crisis hotline or the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or TDD 1-800-787-3224.** This hotline is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, in English, Spanish, and other languages. It can give you the phone numbers of local hotlines and other resources.
- ◆ Call the police or leave if you or your children are in danger!
- ◆ Don't ignore it. The abuse won't go away. Learn how to lower your risk of being a victim before you find yourself in an uncomfortable or threatening situation.
- ◆ Don't keep it to yourself. Talk with someone you trust: a family member, friend, colleague, or faith counselor.



- ◆ If you've been hurt, get medical attention. Go to a doctor or an emergency room and report what happened to you. Ask that they document your visit.
- ◆ Call the police. Abuse is a crime and you have rights.
- ◆ Find out about local battered women's shelters before you have to use them during a crisis. A crisis hotline or the police can help you find one.
- ◆ Plan for how you and your children will escape if you're attacked again. Identify a safe place for them, like a friend's house, where they can go for help.

- ◆ Put aside emergency money as you can. Or ask friends or family members to hold money for you.
- ◆ If you decide to leave, you'll be prepared. Put important papers—marriage license, birth certificates, regularly needed medications, credit cards, checkbooks, insurance information, and other papers—in a place where you can get them quickly.
- ◆ Contact your family court for information about getting a civil protection order. Call a domestic violence court, if one is offered by your state.
- ◆ To find a state-by-state list of places to get help, go to www.womenshealth.gov/violence/state.

Steps to Get Help for Sexual Assault

Take action right away if you've been sexually assaulted.

- ◆ Get away from the attacker to a safe place as fast as you can. Then call 911 or the police.
- ◆ Call a crisis center or a hotline to talk with a counselor. **One hotline is the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 1-800-656-HOPE (4673).**
- ◆ Feelings of shame, guilt, fear, and shock are normal. Get counseling from a trusted professional.
- ◆ Call a friend or family member you trust. If you are that trusted someone, you can help by listening and offering comfort. Go

with her or him to the police, the hospital, or to counseling. Reinforce the message that she or he is not at fault and that it is natural to feel angry and ashamed.

- ◆ Do not wash, comb, or clean any part of your body. Do not change clothes if possible, so the hospital staff can collect evidence. Do not touch or change anything at the scene of the assault.
- ◆ Go to your nearest hospital emergency room as soon as possible. You need to be examined, treated for any injuries, and screened for possible sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) or pregnancy. The doctor will collect evidence using a rape kit for fibers, hairs, saliva, semen, or clothing that the attacker may have left behind.
- ◆ You or the hospital staff can call the police from the emergency room to file a report.
- ◆ Ask the hospital staff about possible support groups you can attend right away.

Steps to Get Help for Elder Abuse

- ◆ When an elder is in immediate danger, call 911 or the local police.
- ◆ For help with locating elder care services, call toll-free to the Eldercare Locator at 1-800-677-1116.
- ◆ Protect your loved ones from abuse. Make sure they get the care and services they need.
- ◆ Every case of elder abuse should be reported to the local authority in your area.

To get immediate help and support,

- Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or TDD 1-800-787-3224.
- Call the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 1-800-656-4673.
- Call the Eldercare Locator at 1-800-677-1116 for help with locating elder care services.

- ◆ Reporting procedures differ in each state. Look in your area phone book for numbers of the Adult Protective Services (APS) agency, or a Department on Aging, an Agency on Aging, or the Department of Social Services.
- ◆ Many states have 24-hour toll-free numbers that take calls for reporting elder abuse. You can get more information on elder abuse from the National Center on Elder Abuse at www.elderabusecenter.org.

Then and Now

In the past, employers didn't get involved if an employee suffered from violence at home. In the 1990s, people began to realize that the abuse would happen at work as well. Abusive partners would harrass the victims at work. Some employers and state governments have started to take steps to address this growing problem.