

Why Should I Care About Elder Abuse?

Elder abuse is an under recognized problem with devastating and even life threatening consequences.

Every day, headlines throughout the U.S. paint a grim picture of seniors who have been abused, neglected, and exploited, often by people they trust the most. Abusers may be spouses, family members, personal acquaintances, or professionals in positions of trust; or opportunistic strangers who prey on the vulnerable.

How big is the problem? No one knows for certain because relatively few cases are identified. Research indicates that more than *one in ten* elder may experience some type of abuse, but only *one in five* cases or fewer are reported. This means that very few seniors who have been abused get the help they need.

One thing is for certain: elder abuse can happen to *any* older individual – your neighbor, your loved one - it can even happen to *you*.

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 elder. **Physical abuse; neglect; emotional or psychological abuse; verbal abuse and threats; financial abuse and exploitation; sexual abuse; and abandonment** are considered forms of elder abuse. In many states, **self-neglect** is also considered mistreatment.

Who is at Risk?

Elder abuse can occur *anywhere* – in the home, in nursing homes, or other institutions. It affects seniors across all socio-economic groups, cultures, and races. Based on available information, women and “older” elders are more likely to be victimized. Dementia is a significant risk factor. Mental health and substance abuse issues - of both abusers and victims - are risk factors. Isolation can also contribute to risk.

What Should I Do if I Suspect Elder Abuse?

Report Your Concerns.

Remember: Most cases of elder abuse go undetected. Don't assume that someone has already reported a suspicious situation.

To report suspected abuse in the community, contact your local adult protective services agency. For state reporting numbers, visit the NCEA website at www.ncea.aoa.gov or call the *Eldercare Locator* at 1-800-677-1116.

If you or someone you know is in a life threatening situation or immediate danger, contact 911 or the local police or sheriff.

To report suspected abuse in a nursing home or long-term care facility, contact your state specific agency. To find the listing, visit the Long-Term Care Ombudsman website: <http://www.ltcombudsman.org/ombudsman>

Types of Elder Abuse

Physical abuse - Use of force to threaten or physically injure a vulnerable elder

Emotional abuse - Verbal attacks, threats, rejection, isolation, or belittling acts that cause or could cause mental anguish, pain, or distress to a senior

Sexual abuse - Sexual contact that is forced, tricked, threatened, or otherwise coerced upon a vulnerable elder, including anyone who is unable to grant consent

Exploitation - Theft, fraud, misuse or neglect of authority, and use of undue influence as a lever to gain control over an older person's money or property

Neglect - A caregiver's failure or refusal to provide for a vulnerable elder's safety, physical, or emotional needs

Abandonment - Desertion of a frail or vulnerable elder by anyone with a duty of care

Self-neglect - An inability to understand the consequences of one's own actions or inaction, which leads to, or may lead to, harm or endangerment

Remember: You do not need to prove that abuse is occurring; it is up to the professionals to investigate the suspicions.

Warning Signs

- **Physical Abuse** - Slap marks, unexplained bruises, most pressure marks, and certain types of burns or blisters, such as cigarette burns
- **Neglect** - Pressure ulcers, filth, lack of medical care, malnutrition or dehydration
- **Emotional Abuse** - Withdrawal from normal activities, unexplained changes in alertness, or other unusual behavioral changes
- **Sexual Abuse** - Bruises around the breasts or genital area and unexplained sexually transmitted diseases
- **Financial Abuse/Exploitation** - Sudden change in finances and accounts, altered wills and trusts, unusual bank withdrawals, checks written as “loans” or “gifts,” and loss of property

What Can I Do to Prevent Elder Abuse?

- *Report suspected mistreatment* to your local adult protective services agency or law enforcement. Although a situation may have already been investigated, if you believe circumstances are getting worse, continue to speak out.
- *Keep in contact* – Talk with your older friends, neighbors, and relatives. Maintaining communication will help decrease isolation, a risk factor for mistreatment. It will also give them a chance to talk about any problems they may be experiencing.
- *Be aware of the possibility of abuse* – Look around and take note of what may be happening with your older neighbors and acquaintances. Do they seem lately to be withdrawn, nervous, fearful, sad, or anxious, especially around certain people, when they have not seemed so in the past?
- *Contact your local Area Agency on Aging* office to identify local programs and sources of support, such as *Meals on Wheels*. These programs help elders to maintain health, well-being, and independence – a good defense against abuse.
- *Volunteer* – There are many local opportunities to become involved in programs that provide assistance and support for seniors.
- *World Elder Abuse Awareness Day* - Elder abuse is a global issue. Contact your local aging services organizations to find out how your community will observe World Day. Help to raise awareness by talking about the issue.
- *Learn more about the issue* - Visit the *National Center on Elder Abuse* website at www.ncea.aoa.gov.

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The NCEA
is a national resource center
that provides technical support and
information to professionals and advocates
working on behalf of older individuals.
It also provides information
and referral to the public.

The NCEA is not an investigation, nor a
reporting, agency, and cannot intervene in
cases of suspected elder mistreatment.

For More Information:

NCEA

www.ncea.aoa.gov

Eldercare Locator

1-800-677-1116

www.eldercare.gov

National Long Term Care Ombudsman Resource Center

<http://www.ltombudsman.org/>

Contact Us:

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**Together, we have the
power to prevent
elder abuse.**