

AgePage

Elder Abuse

Gerald, 73, had a stroke, which left him unable to care for himself. His son offered to help, and Gerald moved in with him and his family. But Gerald's son and daughter-in-law worked all day and were busy with their kids in the evenings. Gerald hated being a burden on them and tried to take care of himself.

One day, Gerald's friend Carmen came to visit. She was surprised to see food stains on his clothes and sores on his heels. His room smelled like urine, too. Gerald seemed depressed and withdrawn — not at all like the jolly, witty friend she'd known for years. Carmen worried that Gerald's family was neglecting him.

Abuse can happen to anyone — no matter the person's age, sex, race, religion, or ethnic or cultural background. Each year, hundreds of thousands of adults over the age of 60 are abused, neglected, or financially exploited. This is called elder abuse.

Abuse can happen in many places, including the older person's home, a family member's house, an assisted living facility, or a nursing home. The mistreatment of older adults can be by family members, strangers, health care providers, caregivers, or friends.

Types of Abuse

There are many types of abuse:

■ **Physical abuse** happens when someone causes bodily harm by hitting, pushing, or slapping. This may also include restraining an older adult against his/her will, such as locking them in a room or tying them to furniture.

■ **Emotional abuse**, sometimes called psychological abuse, can include a caregiver saying hurtful words, yelling, threatening, or repeatedly ignoring the older adult. Keeping that person

from seeing close friends and relatives is another form of emotional abuse.

■ **Neglect** occurs when the caregiver does not try to respond to the older adult's needs. This may include physical, emotional, and social needs, or withholding food, medications, or access to health care.

■ **Abandonment** is leaving an older adult who needs help alone without planning for his or her care.

■ **Sexual abuse** involves a caregiver forcing an older adult to watch or be part of sexual acts.

■ **Financial abuse** happens when money or belongings are stolen from an older adult. It can include forging checks, taking someone else's retirement or Social Security benefits, or using a person's credit cards and bank accounts without their permission. It also includes changing names on a will, bank account, life insurance policy, or title to a house without permission.

Who Is Being Abused?

Most victims of abuse are women, but some are men. Likely targets are older adults who have no family or friends nearby and people with disabilities, memory problems, or dementia.

Elder abuse can happen to any older adult, but often affects those who depend on others for help with activities of everyday life — including bathing, dressing, and taking medicine. People who are frail may appear to be easy victims.

Money Matters

After his mother died, Victor started looking after his 80-year-old grandfather, Jasper. Because of his failing eyesight, Jasper could no longer drive to the bank. So, Jasper permitted Victor to withdraw money from the bank every month to pay bills. Lately, it seems the bank balance is lower than it should be. Jasper wonders if Victor is keeping some cash for himself.

Financial abuse is a widespread and hard-to-detect issue. Even someone you've never met can steal your financial information using the telephone, internet, or email. Be careful about sharing any financial information over the phone or online — you don't know who will use it.

In addition to the theft of an older person's money or belongings, financial abuse also includes:

Financial neglect, which occurs when an older adult's financial responsibilities such as paying rent or mortgage, medical expenses or insurance, utility bills, or property taxes, are ignored, and the person's bills are not paid.

Financial exploitation, which is the misuse, mismanagement, or exploitation of property, belongings, or assets. This includes using an older adult's assets without consent, under false pretense, or through intimidation and/or manipulation.

Health care fraud can be committed by doctors, hospital staff, or other health care workers. It includes overcharging, billing twice for the same service, falsifying Medicaid or Medicare claims, or charging for care that wasn't provided. Older adults and caregivers should keep an eye out for this type of fraud.

What Are Signs of Abuse?

You may see signs of abuse or neglect when you visit an older adult at home or in an eldercare facility. You may notice the person:

- Stops taking part in activities he or she enjoys
- Looks messy, with unwashed hair or dirty clothes
- Has trouble sleeping
- Loses weight for no reason
- Becomes withdrawn or acts agitated or violent
- Displays signs of trauma, like rocking back and forth
- Has unexplained bruises, burns, cuts, or scars
- Has broken eyeglasses/frames, or physical signs of violence or being restrained
- Develops bed sores or other preventable conditions
- Lacks medical aids (glasses, walker, dentures, hearing aid, medications)
- Is behind on mortgage or rent payments or has been evicted

- Has hazardous, unsafe, or unclean living conditions

- Displays signs of insufficient care or unpaid bills despite adequate financial resources

If you see signs of abuse, try talking with the older adult to find out what's going on. For instance, the abuse may be from another resident and not from someone who works at the nursing home or assisted living facility. Most importantly, get help or report what you see to adult protective services. You do not need to prove that abuse is occurring. Professionals will investigate.

Who Can Help?

Elder abuse will not stop on its own. Someone else needs to step in and help. Many older adults are too ashamed to report mistreatment. Or, they're afraid if they make a report it will get back to the abuser and make the situation worse.

If you think someone you know is being abused — physically, emotionally, or financially — talk with him or her when the two of you are alone. You could say you think something is wrong and you're worried. Offer to take him or her to get help, for instance, at a local adult protective services agency.

Many local, state, and national social service agencies can help with emotional, legal, and financial abuse.

The Administration for Community Living has a National Center on Elder Abuse where you can learn about how to report abuse, where to get help, and state laws that deal with abuse and neglect. Go to <https://ncea.acl.gov> for more information. Or, call the Eldercare Locator weekdays at 800-677-1116.

Most states require that doctors and lawyers report elder mistreatment. Family and friends can also report it. Do not wait. Help is available.

If you think someone is in urgent danger, call 911 or your local police to get help right away.

Caregiver Stress — You're Not Alone

Caring for an older adult can be rewarding. It can also be demanding, difficult, and often stressful. Caregivers may need to be available around the clock to fix meals, provide nursing care, take care of laundry and cleaning, drive to doctor's appointments, and pay bills. Often, family caregivers have to give up paying jobs to make time for these new responsibilities.

It may be hard to keep a positive outlook when there's little hope of the older adult's physical and mental condition improving. Over time, the demands and stress of caregiving can take their toll. A caregiver might not even know he or she is being neglectful or abusive.

If you are a caregiver, make sure you have time to rest and take care of your needs. Ask a family member or friend to help for a weekend, or even for a few hours. Having time to take care of yourself will help you remain healthy and have patience and energy for caregiving. Churches, synagogues, and other faith-based organizations in your community may have volunteers who can visit and help on a regular basis. Respite care provides a break for caregivers. It can be arranged for just an afternoon or for several days or weeks. Visit the ARCH National Respite Network and Resource Center's National Respite Locator (<https://archrespite.org/respitelocator>) to find respite services in your area. Caregiving support groups may also help. Exercise can help with caregiving stress and emotional well-being.

What Is the Long-Term Effect of Abuse?

Most physical wounds heal in time. But elder abuse can lead to early death, harm physical and psychological health, destroy social and family ties, cause devastating financial loss, and more.

Any type of mistreatment can leave the abused person feeling fearful and depressed. Sometimes, the victim thinks the abuse is his or her fault. Adult protective service agencies can suggest support groups and counseling that can help the abused person heal the emotional wounds.

For More Information About Elder Abuse and Where to Get Help

Eldercare Locator

800-677-1116 (toll-free)
eldercarelocator@n4a.org
<https://eldercare.acl.gov>

Consumer Financial Protection Bureau

855-411-2372 | 855-729-2372 (TTY/toll-free)
www.consumerfinance.gov/practitioner-resources/resources-for-older-adults

National Adult Protective Services Association

217-523-4431
www.napsa-now.org

National Center on Elder Abuse

855-500-3537 (toll-free)
ncea-info@aoa.hhs.gov
<https://ncea.acl.gov>

National Domestic Violence Hotline

800-799-7233 (toll-free, 24/7)
800-787-3224 (TTY/toll-free)
www.thehotline.org/get-help

National Elder Fraud Hotline

833-FRAUD-11 or 833-372-8311
<https://stopelderfraud.ovc.ojp.gov>

U.S. Department of Justice

202-514-2000 | 800-877-8339 (TTY/toll-free)
elder.justice@usdoj.gov
www.justice.gov/elderjustice
www.justice.gov/elderjustice/roadmap

For information on health and aging, including resources on caregiving and Alzheimer's disease, contact:

National Institute on Aging Information Center

800-222-2225 (toll-free)
800-222-4225 (TTY/toll-free)
niaic@nia.nih.gov
www.nia.nih.gov

Visit www.nia.nih.gov/health to find more health and aging information from NIA and subscribe to email alerts. Visit <https://order.nia.nih.gov> to order free print publications.



National Institute
on Aging