



Survivors **IN LATER LIFE**

Elder abuse is the intentional or negligent mistreatment of an adult over the age of 60. Hundreds of thousands of seniors are victimized each year. Incident rates are likely much higher, considering elder abuse often goes unreported to adult protective service organizations.

TYPES OF ELDER ABUSE

The National Institute on Aging (NIA) defines six types of elder abuse:

- 1. Physical abuse:** Inflicting pain or injury through such actions as slapping, hitting, bruising, or restraining. Physical abuse can also be inflicted through medication tampering—giving too much or withholding medication.
- 2. Sexual abuse:** Any non-consensual sexual contact, whether comprehended or not.
- 3. Emotional or psychological abuse:** Inflicting mental anguish or distress through verbal or nonverbal acts such as threatening, intimidating, or humiliating.
- 4. Neglect:** Failure to provide food, clothing, shelter, healthcare, or protection.
- 5. Financial abuse:** Illegal use, misuse, or concealment of funds, property, assets, or benefits for someone else's gain.
- 6. Abandonment:** Desertion of a vulnerable adult.



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WHO IS AT RISK FOR ELDER ABUSE?

Anyone can be a perpetrator of abuse later in life. The person most likely to cause harm to a senior is a caregiver, whether that's an intimate partner, adult child, other family member, or a paid caregiver. Factors that make a person more likely to cause harm to a senior include:

- Mental health problems
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Exposure to abuse as a child
- Inadequate coping skills
- Financial dependence on the person being cared for
- Lack of caregiver support or access to respite services

RECOGNIZING ABUSE LATER IN LIFE

Unfortunately, a senior who is being abused may not come forward for a variety of reasons, such as fear of retaliation by the person causing harm, being financially dependent on the person causing harm, or not knowing they're being abused. But no one deserves to be abused or neglected, which is why it's important for others to speak up if they suspect an older adult is being abused.

Signs of elder abuse include:

- Unexplained bruises, marks, broken bones, or abrasions that could be indicative of physical abuse or any bruises or injuries to the breasts or genitalia
- Withdrawal from previously enjoyed activities, sudden changes in alertness, or unusual depression
- Sudden changes to financial situation, banking, or spending patterns
- Poor hygiene, bedsores, unusual weight loss, or unattended medical needs
- Belittling, threats, or frequent arguments between patient and caregiver
- The senior seems afraid of the caregiver

REPORTING ELDER ABUSE

Elder abuse takes many forms and can be difficult to detect. If you suspect a senior loved one is being abused, report it to authorities.

If you believe the person to be in imminent danger, call 911. Otherwise, call Adult Protective Services at (765) 608-5226 or (800) 992-6978.

WHAT WILL ADULT PROTECTIVE SERVICES DO?

Anyone can report suspected abuse to adult protective services. Mandatory reporters—people working in professions who are obligated to report abuse if they suspect it—include police officers, doctors and nurses, clergy, dentists, etc.

Once Adult Protective Services is notified, the worker will assign a case worker to investigate. The case worker will then:

- Interview the potential victim, witnesses, other sources, and the alleged abuser(s)
- Examine evidence, such as medical records and bank account activity
- Address any immediate needs for food, shelter, or law enforcement protection

If the case worker does not find any evidence abuse is occurring, then the case will be closed. If, on the other hand, the case worker determines someone is being abused, they will work with the survivor to create a case plan to stop the abuse. That typically involves referrals to social services to address not only the survivor's health and safety needs, but also physical and mental health treatment, housing assistance, legal assistance, financial assistance, personal care, and meal assistance.

In cases in which the Adult Protective Services case worker believes the survivor is unable to make decisions for themselves, the case worker will order a capacity screening and may involve the court to assign a guardian.

Alternatives Incorporated provides housing and mobile services for elderly domestic and sexual violence survivors.