

DESK REFERENCE FOR RECOGNIZING AND RESPONDING TO ABUSE, NEGLECT AND FINANCIAL EXPLOITATION OF OLDER ADULTS

This desk reference is designed to help you assess for abuse, neglect and/or financial exploitation with the older adults you work with in your centers. A common myth is that the majority of abuse and neglect of older adults occurs in assisted living and residential settings; however, the reality is that the majority of the abuse occurs in the older adult's own home. These are the people you are seeing on a regular basis. Many older adults do not report the abuse they face even if they are able. Some fear retaliation from the abuser, while others believe if they turn in their abusers who may be family members, no one else will care for them. This guide will assist you in identifying the signs of abuse, neglect and financial exploitation and in providing assistance and referral for victims.

Abuse of older adults can happen to anyone regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status. Older adults are typically abused, neglected, or financially exploited by people they love, trust, and rely on, such as:

- Adult children;
- Spouse or partner;
- Grandchildren or other family members;
- Friends & neighbors; or
- Other regular caretakers or helpers.

Caregiver stress is a risk factor for abuse and neglect of older adults.

The demands of daily care and support for even a more independent older adult can cause significant stress for those who are providing care. Abusive behavior is sometimes blamed on resulting frustration and anger.

However, caregiver stress does not excuse abusive behavior. Abuse is always a choice.

Abuse, Neglect & Financial Exploitation of Older Adults:

ABUSE is any behavior used to control the older adult physically, sexually or emotionally.

NEGLECT is a caregiver's refusal or inability to provide for an older adult's safety, physical or emotional needs.

SELF NEGLECT is the adult's inability to perform tasks essential to caring for him or herself. Mental impairments can be a contributing factor.

FINANCIAL EXPLOITATION is stealing money or property from an older adult, or using money as a way to maintain control.

RED FLAGS

Physical Abuse:

- Unexplained signs of injury such as bruises, welts or scars.
- Broken bones, sprains or dislocations.
- Broken eyeglasses or frames.
- An older adult reporting not having the appropriate medications and/or not taking them appropriately.
- Signs of being restrained, such as rope marks on the wrist.

Sexual Abuse:

- Bruises around the breasts or genitals.
- Unexplained vaginal or anal bleeding.
- Torn, stained or bloody underclothing.

- Inappropriate touching, photographing the older adult in suggestive poses.
- Any unwanted sexualized behavior or advances reported by the older adult.

Verbal, Emotional or Psychological Abuse:

- Unexplained or uncharacteristic changes in behavior, such as the older adult’s withdrawal from normal activities, such as coming to the center.
- An older adult reporting (or you witnessing) family members or caretakers who are verbally aggressive or demeaning, controlling or uncaring.
- Threatening or coercive behavior.

Neglect:

- Lack of basic hygiene, adequate food, or clean and appropriate clothing.
- Lack of medical aids (glasses, walker, dentures, hearing aid, medications).
- Unusual weight loss.
- Untreated medical problems.

Financial Exploitation:

- Changes in the older adult’s financial condition that could be sudden or gradual.
- Suspicious changes in wills and power of attorney.
- Addition of names to their bank signature card.
- An older adult reporting they have unpaid bills although they have the money to pay for them.
- An older adult reporting scams (e.g., people who offer to work for cash in advance but don’t do the job).
- Dependency. If the caregiver is financially dependent on the older adult, financial exploitation may occur. If the reverse is true and the elder depends on family for financial support, resentment that leads to abusive behavior may occur.

Reporting Abuse, Neglect or Financial Exploitation

Although there is no legal mandatory reporting requirement in New York State, it is important and ethically responsible to stand up for an older adult in need. If you have any concerns or suspicions that an older adult at your center is being abused, neglected or financially exploited, please make the call to get them assistance. You do not need proof of the abuse or neglect.

To report abuse, call your local county Department of Social Services Adult Protective Services. Referrals are accepted Monday-Friday, during normal business hours. If you feel it is an emergency, call 911.

For general information about elder abuse and programs for older adults:

*NYS Office for the Aging,
Senior Citizen Helpline: 1-800-342-9871
www.aging.ny.gov*

*NYS Office of Children and Family Services,
Bureau of Adult Services: 518-402-6513
www.ocfs.state.ny.us*

For information about abuse of older adults and domestic violence:

*NYS Domestic and Sexual Violence Hotline:
1-800-942-6906*

*English & español, Multi-language Accessibility
National Relay Service for Deaf or Hard of Hearing: 711*

*NYS Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence:
518-457-5800
www.opdv.ny.gov*