



# Older Adults and Elder Abuse

As they age, older adults may need assistance from others with getting to and from medical appointments, managing their finances, preparing meals, personal care and performing other activities that enable them to continue living in their homes and communities. Unfortunately, increasing numbers of older adults experience abuse from the very people they trust to provide them with this much-needed assistance.

According to the National Center on Elder Abuse (NCEA), elder abuse most often occurs when older adults are mistreated by someone with whom they have a trusting relationship—most often a spouse, sibling, child, friend or caregiver. In institutional settings like nursing homes, assisted living facilities and hospitals, elder abuse can occur when older adults are mistreated by someone who has a legal or contractual obligation to provide them with care or protection.

While it can be difficult to quantify the precise number of individuals who experience elder abuse, the National Center on Elder Abuse cites research indicating that approximately one in 10 older adults have experienced some form of elder abuse. However, for many reasons, elder abuse is under reported. NCEA also cites a survey conducted in New York showing that for every case of case of elder abuse that is reported to authorities, 24 cases go unreported.



## Types of Elder Abuse

While there are many types of elder abuse, they all have one thing in common: the mistreatment of an older adult that most often occurs by a person with whom they have a trusting relationship. NCEA provides the following definitions for some of the most common forms of elder abuse.

- **Physical abuse:** Inflicting, or threatening to inflict, physical pain, bodily harm, injury or depriving the older adult of a basic need.
- **Emotional abuse:** Inflicting mental pain, anguish or distress through verbal or nonverbal acts.
- **Neglect:** Refusal or failure by those responsible to provide food, shelter, health care or protection.
- **Self-Neglect:** Neglect of one's own care through hoarding; poor hygiene; failure to take essential medications; failure to provide one's self with adequate food, nutrition or other basic needs.
- **Abandonment:** The desertion by anyone who has assumed the responsibility for care or custody.
- **Sexual:** Non-consensual sexual contact of any kind; coercion to witness sexual behaviors.
- **Exploitation:** Illegal taking, misuse or concealment of funds, property or assets.

## How to Spot Elder Abuse

Although recognizing elder abuse can be difficult, NCEA has identified the following warning signs that may be an indication that further attention and action is needed.

An older adult may be experiencing elder abuse if it appears that they:

- are socially isolated or cut off from contact with friends and/or loved ones;
- are confused or depressed;
- are undernourished or dehydrated;
- appear dirty or have unexplained bruises or bed sores;
- are not receiving care for health problems—eyesight, dental, hearing, incontinence;
- are abusing drugs or alcohol; and
- have trouble sleeping;

For other signs of elder abuse, visit <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/elder-abuse#signs>.

## Ways to Prevent Elder Abuse

Education is critical to preventing elder abuse. In addition, older adults can reduce their risk of experiencing elder abuse through the following:

- staying engaged in their communities;
- not providing personal information, such as Social Security numbers, over the phone;
- reviewing their wills periodically—and ensuring that a living will or advance directive is in place—to protect their wishes; and
- working with a financial adviser before making large purchases or investments.

For other ways to prevent elder abuse, visit <http://www.asaging.org/elder-abuse-prevention-resources>.

## What to Do If You Suspect Elder Abuse

As with other forms of abuse, older adults who have experienced abuse tend to blame themselves. If you observe any of the warning signs mentioned earlier and are concerned that an older adult shows signs of abuse, take the following actions:

- **Talk to the person you suspect is being abused.** NCEA recommends asking if elder abuse has occurred, whether the older adult is afraid of anyone or if they are being harmed by anyone. It is important to remind them that it is not their fault.
- **Contact 911.** If it appears that an older adult is in immediate danger due to suspected elder abuse, contact the police right away.

- **Contact Adult Protective Services.** Each state's Adult Protective Services office has the authority to conduct an investigation of any suspected cases of elder abuse.
- **Contact your state's Long-Term Care Ombudsman.** For older adults residing in a licensed nursing home or assisted living facility, a state's Long-Term Care Ombudsman will act as an advocate for suspected victims of elder abuse and can provide information about the appropriate licensing, monitoring and regulatory agencies.
- **Call the Eldercare Locator.** *The Eldercare Locator's trained staff can connect older adults and concerned caregivers with local reporting organizations.*

## RESOURCES

### Adult Protective Services

[www.napsa-now.org/get-help/help-in-your-area](http://www.napsa-now.org/get-help/help-in-your-area)

Adult Protective Services (APS) is a social services program provided by states and local governments for older adults and individuals with disabilities who are in need of assistance. APS investigates cases of abuse, neglect or exploitation, working closely with a variety of allied professionals such as physicians, nurses, paramedics, firefighters and law enforcement officers. APS programs vary from state to state in respect to populations served, services provided and scope.

### National Long-Term Care Ombudsman Resource Center (202) 332-2275

[www.ltcombudsman.org](http://www.ltcombudsman.org)

Long-term care ombudsmen are advocates for residents of nursing homes, board and care homes and assisted living facilities. Ombudsmen provide information about how to find a long-term care facility, how to ensure quality care and are trained to resolve problems and assist with complaints.

### Critical Conversations Series

*Older Adults and Elder Abuse* is part of the Eldercare Locator's Critical Conversations series of fact sheets, which address emerging topics and important issues impacting the health and well-being of older adults.

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### Elder Justice Initiative's Victim Connect Hotline

**1 (855) 4-VICTIM (1-855-484-2846)**

The Elder Justice Initiative's Victim Connect Hotline connect callers to specialists who help victims of elder abuse navigate through the criminal justice system by providing support, assessing needs, developing a safety plan, connecting them to resources and identifying gaps in service.

### National Center on Elder Abuse

**1 (855) 500-3537**

**Monday–Friday, 8:30 a.m.–5 p.m. PT**

[www.ncea.acl.gov](http://www.ncea.acl.gov)

The NCEA provides the latest information regarding research, training, best practices, news and resources on elder abuse, neglect and exploitation to professionals and the public.

### Eldercare Locator

**1 (800) 677-1116**

**Monday–Friday, 9:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m. ET**

[www.eldercare.acl.gov](http://www.eldercare.acl.gov)

Launched in 1991, the Eldercare Locator is the only national information and referral resource to provide support to consumers across the spectrum of issues affecting older Americans. The Locator was established and is funded by the U.S. Administration on Aging, part of Administration for Community Living, and is administered by the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a).



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