AGEIA HEALTH SERVICES

How to Recognize Abuse

Elder Abuse

How to Stop it

“Sure, I'm for helping the elderly. I'm going to be old myself someday.” -- Lillian Carter, spoken when she was in her eighties
In the United States, each state has its own definition of “abuse” in law. Typically, it is defined as:

“The willful action or inaction that inflicts injury, unreasonable confinement, intimidation, or punishment on a vulnerable adult.”
Estimates vary but it is believed that 4-6% of the elderly are abused. Approximately 450,000 elderly experienced abuse in 1996 nationwide.
What is Elder Abuse?

Abuse...it is a terrible thing and unfortunately it does even happen with our Seniors, a very vulnerable group of people. For most of us it is hard to believe that in a protected environment like a Senior Community that abuse to residents could ever happen, but it does.
What is Elder Abuse

When most of us think of abuse the images that come to mind are usually violent and the people in the images are usually domestic couples in a dispute or small children.

No matter what form it takes...

Abuse of a vulnerable adult is wrong and illegal!

But we do not often think about abuse in the elderly being a real problem. In some cases the abuse of elders is extremely violent. In other cases it is more subtle and harder to detect.
Why are Elderly a Protected Group?

The law defines a “vulnerable adult” as:

- A person 60 years of age or older with functional, physical, or mental inability to care for self; or
- An adult 18 years of age or older who:
  - Has a developmental disability; or
  - Has a guardian; or
  - Lives in a nursing facility, boarding home, adult family home, or soldier’s home, residential habilitation center, or any facility licensed or required to by licensed by the Department of Social Health Services; or
  - Receives in-home services through a licensed health care agency, hospice, or an individual provider or self-directs his/her own care.
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Vulnerable Adult

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Vulnerable Adult
Let’s test your knowledge…. Which person would be classified as a vulnerable adult?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation #1</th>
<th>Situation #2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>85 year old Ed is being financially exploited by his son. Ed takes care of himself well, lives at home by himself, and continues to drive.</td>
<td>23 year old David has a developmental disability and lives at home with his parents.</td>
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</table>
The correct answer is situation #2, David. Although Ed is 85 years old, he is still able to take care of himself.
In the home, an institution, even a retirement community.

Most abuse of elders occurs in the home and family members are the people most likely to abuse elders.

Abusers can be men or women. They may be acquaintances, sons, daughters, grandchildren, spouses, caregivers, or other staff working in a community, volunteers, contracted service providers, physicians and the list goes on, but statistics tell us that the most common abusers are men age 36 to 50. Elder abuse in senior care communities is actually less common than in the home.
Elder abuse generally occurs when a caregiver (friend, relative or professional) is not suited to take care of the elder. As a result the caregiver vents his or her frustration on the elder.
WHAT TRIGGERS ABUSE?

In Senior Communities, elder abuse may occur for several reasons, including:
- Lack of knowledge regarding senior care
- Poor training on how to provide services or work with certain diagnosis such as Alzheimer’s Disease
- Workplace stress - burnout
- Personal problems at home
- Poor personal health
- Feeling unappreciated
- Difficult resident

Many times a caregiver will cry out for help but in the wrong way!
What can be done to eliminate abuse?

Individuals who work with the elderly can start by learning what stresses them out. They should not avoid problems, instead try to figure out what they are doing to cause their problems. It’s also important to pay close attention to how your body reacts to stress. If you feel your heart rate escalating, body temperature rising, muscles clenching then it is time to divert what you are doing to something else.

Taking “time out” may just actually save a person from actions they could never live with.
What can be done to eliminate abuse?

If you are in the middle of providing services you may have to ask another worker to take over your resident. Sometimes even a 10 minute rest break taken with supportive friends is enough to get your mind off your frustrations.

When you’re feeling overwhelmed by stress look around you. Be thankful for the good things in your life.
Types of Abuse - PHYSICAL

PHYSICAL ABUSE

The willful action of inflicting bodily injury or physical mistreatment. Actions that may constitute physical abuse include:

- Striking with or without an object
- Slapping, pinching, choking, kicking, shoving, prodding
- Use of physical or chemical restraints (unless consistent with licensing requirements and under a physician’s order)
- Withholding any adaptive device: teeth, walkers, hearing aids, glasses, wheelchair, etc.
Types of Abuse - PHYSICAL

Indicators of Physical Abuse

- Statement that abuse is occurring
- Unexplained injuries, broken bones, bruises, burns, open wounds
- Lacerations, welts, or black eyes
- Symmetrical grip marks on arms or legs
- Unexplained fear
- Depression, suicidal threats
- Sudden changes in behaviors
- Apathy (lack of concern)
- Denial of problems even if present

Resident was hit in the face multiple times with a Hoyer lift
Gertrude is a 72 year old woman who is confined to her wheelchair after a massive stroke one year ago and is unable to move her wheelchair. She lives with her 32 year old granddaughter, Sarah, a single parent of three children. Sarah lives a harried life, working two part-time jobs. Sarah cannot afford to pay someone to come to care for Gertrude. The children stay at another neighbor’s home during Sarah’s work hours.

Before work at 5p.m., Sarah wheels Gertrude to the dining table and leaves her there until she returns from work a 1 a.m. Sarah refuses to leave Gertrude any water on the table to minimize Gertrude’s need to go to the bathroom. Gertrude frequently remains in her own excrement in her incontinent brief until Sarah returns home.

Is this physical abuse?
**YES.** Gertrude is a vulnerable adult according to the law because she does not have the functional or physical ability to care for herself. Sarah intentionally restrains Gertrude at the dining table knowing that Gertrude cannot move, get water, food, or even call for help. Gertrude is left to sit in her own excrement, which can cause skin wounds and infections that can be life threatening.
Types of Abuse - MENTAL

MENTAL ABUSE

The willful action or inaction or mental or verbal abuse. Creating situations harmful to the elder’s self-esteem. Actions that may indicate mental abuse include:

- Coercion, harassment
- Inappropriately isolating a vulnerable adult from family, friends, or regular activity
- Verbal assaults that include ridiculing, intimidation, yelling, or swearing
Types of Abuse - MENTAL

Indicators of Mental Abuse

- Statements that emotional abuse is occurring
- Demonstration of excessive fear
- Withdrawal
- Low self-esteem
- Extreme passivity
- Unusual agitation
- Excuses why he/she cannot make phone calls or leave the house
- Nervousness around certain people
- Increased uncertainty/anxiety

Mental Abuse can cause an elder to be extremely withdrawn and non-communicative.
Mary lives in an apartment next to 73 year old Mrs. Henry and her daughter, Carrie, who has been caring for Mrs. Henry for a month since Mrs. Henry’s stroke. Mary has tried to see Mrs. Henry many times over the past couple of weeks, but Carrie answers the door and always has an excuse why Mrs. Henry cannot see Mary. One evening, Mary heard Carrie shouting loudly at Mrs. Henry, stating, “You old crone, you are nothing but a pain. No you can’t call your friend, Mary. What happens in our family is nobody’s business.

Is this mental abuse?
YES. Mrs. Henry is a vulnerable adult according to the law because she does not have the functional or physical ability to care for herself related to her stroke. Carrie is intentionally isolating her mother and verbally abusing her by making statements to lower her self-esteem.
**SEXUAL ABUSE**

The law states that sexual abuse is any form of nonconsensual sexual contact. Actions that constitute sexual abuse include:

- Unwanted or inappropriate touching, rape, sodomy, sexual coercion, sexually explicit photographing and sexual harassment
- Any sexual contact between a staff person, who is not also a resident or client, of a facility or program authorized under law, whether or not it is consensual
Types of Abuse - SEXUAL

Indicators of Sexual Abuse

- Statements that sexual abuse is occurring
- Unexplained bleeding, wounds, or pain from orifices
- Bruising around genital area
- Painful urination or defecation
- Difficulty walking or sitting
- Inappropriate sexual behavior
- Regressive behaviors
- Fearful bathing or assistance with dressing
- Self-destructive behaviors

Sexual Abuse can cause an elder extreme fear and distrust of even familiar people
Dr. Kenny has been Elizabeth’s doctor for the past 10 years, treating her for a heart problem. Elizabeth is 24 years old and has Down’s Syndrome and lives at home with her mother. Elizabeth has trouble communicating verbally. Her mother brought her by to see Dr. Kenny several times lately because of complaints of stomach pain. When Dr. Kenny saw her today, Elizabeth seemed upset, would not look at her, and would not let her touch her, saying, “don’t, don’t.” The mother stated that lately Elizabeth has been isolating herself in her room more, but becomes increasingly upset and clingy when her new therapist, Jim comes to work with Elizabeth. The mother also said Elizabeth has been wetting the bed nightly for the past week.

Could this be signs of sexual abuse?
Exercise 4: Answer

**Possibly.** Elizabeth is a vulnerable adult according to the law because she does not have the functional or physical ability to care for herself related to her Down’s Syndrome. There are definitely enough signs and symptoms that warrant a closer examination of what is going on. Elizabeth’s mother did a good job of taking her to Dr. Kenny and sharing all that has been going on with Elizabeth.
FINANCIAL EXPLOITATION

The law defines financial exploitation as the illegal or improper use of the property, income, resources, or trust funds of the vulnerable adult by any person for any person’s profit or advantage other than for the vulnerable adult’s profit or advantage. Possible indicators of exploitation include:

- Bills not paid
- Signing documents without full understanding of consequences at the insistence of another person
- Possessions are disappearing from the house
- Unexplained withdrawals from accounts or ATM
- Forged signatures on checks or documents
- Sudden change where mail is being sent
- Missing Checks
George hired Glen to help him with activities of daily living. The 81 year old retired lawyer’s hip and cardiac problem affects his mobility and balance significantly; falling is a danger. Since George hired Glen one month ago, he has given Glen $800 to fix his car and $725 for a dental crown in addition to his regular hourly salary. George has “misplaced” his checkbook. When George’s daughter, Karla, called to talk to her father, Glen said George was unavailable and could not come to the phone. Today George’s neighbor called Karla, to say that she ran into Glen, who said that George was going to include him in his will. When Karla heard this she immediately called Adult Protective Services (state agency that investigates adult abuse). George was reluctant at first but after awhile he confessed that Glen threatened to quit providing care for him if he didn’t help him financially.
Types of Abuse

**Neglect**
A pattern of conduct or inaction by a person or entity with a duty of care, but that fails to provide the goods/services needed to maintain the physical or mental health of the vulnerable adult.

**Example of Neglect**
Linda had been caring for her husband without help for a month since his stroke. The medicine she had to give him for his edema made him have to go to the toilet constantly and he required her assistance. For the last 2 weeks she quit giving him his nighttime medicine so she could get some much needed rest.
Types of Abuse

Self-Neglect

The failure of a vulnerable adult, not living in a facility, to provide space needed for him/her self or the goods and services necessary for the individual’s well-being. This includes an adult receiving services through home health, hospice, or an individual provider.

Example of Self-Neglect

John is concerned about a renter in his apartment building, 70 year old Joan. She has not left her apartment for the past 2 weeks and yells, “Go away!”. Joan refuses to open the door. She has not paid her rent for the last 2 months, nor has she picked up her mail. John has not seen Joan leave or anyone deliver food for over 2 months. She has multiple cats and there is a terrible odor coming from the apartment. John is also aware that Joan has taken some pretty nasty falls in the past couple of weeks.
You can play a vital part in helping vulnerable adults by reporting your concerns about possible abuse.
As a permissive reporter, you are encouraged to fully understand, recognize, and report abuse, neglect, self-neglect, or financial exploitation of a vulnerable adult.

Let’s stop these perpetrators in their tracks!
It’s simple...

To protect those vulnerable adults that are so dear to us report any concerns immediately to your Executive Director.
What Have I Learned???

Time for your competency test
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