

## About Elder Abuse

The Committee on Aging estimates that 1 in 20 older adults is abused each year. Elder abuse can happen to any older adult regardless of income, education, race, culture or religion.

**Call 421-LIFE (421-5433) if you notice any signs of elder abuse.**

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### **What is *elder abuse*?**

Elder abuse takes different forms, such as:

#### Neglect/Self-neglect

In this case, caregivers, or older adults themselves, are not meeting daily living needs. Things like withholding food, medical treatment or personal care are examples. It can be intentional or unintentional. Self-neglect happens when older adults don't want to, or can't, do things on their own because of mental confusion or a physical disability.

#### Psychological Abuse

This is deliberate conduct that causes mental anguish and dehumanizes or belittles the older adult. Things like name-calling, threats of physical harm, or threats of placing the person in a nursing home are examples of psychological abuse.

#### Physical Abuse

When an older adult is deliberately hit and suffers bodily harm, that's physical abuse. It also includes scratching, cuts, bruises, broken bones, physical restraint, attempted murder and murder.

#### Exploitation

This means theft of money, assets or other valuables. Assets include cash, Social Security and retirement funds, real estate, jewelry, furniture or any other items of value. People who might exploit an older adult include family members, caregivers, housekeepers, sales persons, and even telephone scammers.

### **Why does elder abuse happen?**

Most older adults will eventually need help with many day-to-day tasks like fixing meals, doing housekeeping or going shopping. But caring for an elderly person can be overwhelming, or it can become physically impossible. Most families care for elders with love and respect, but when abuse occurs, a family member or caregiver is usually involved.

### **Why don't older adults ask for help?**

Only 1 in 6 cases of elder abuse is reported. Abused elders may not want to tell because of:

- Shame or embarrassment
- Fear of someone "settling the score"
- Sense of resignation or powerlessness
- Family loyalty
- Lack of credibility
- Fear of nursing homes or institutions

### **What are some of the warning signs of elder abuse?**

Here are a few things to watch for when you visit or talk with an elder. If you notice any of these signs, call Adult Protective Services at 421-LIFE (421-5433):

- Change in behavior
- Cuts, bruises or burns
- Confinement
- Isolation
- Depression
- Fear and/or anxiety
- Mental confusion
- Poor hygiene
- Poor environment
- Inadequate health care
- Inability to perform daily tasks of living
- Unusual bank withdrawals
- Changes in power of attorney
- Personal belongings are missing
- Different signatures on checks