



NEWS RELEASE

January 11, 2005

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Elder Abuse: under- reported and expected to increase Hamilton County hotline celebrates 15th anniversary

- Laura thinks her elderly mother's confusion is stubbornness and, in her frustration, continually belittles her and threatens to put her in a nursing home.
- Sam loves his 82-year-old bedridden wife, but he's too weak to lift her to change the sheets.
- Neighborhood boys help Stanley with yard work, but coerce him into paying them large sums of money, nearly depleting his savings.

Abuse, neglect, self-neglect and exploitation of the elderly is a largely hidden problem that is expected to grow as the nation's population ages. With that growth comes an increasing need for people to be aware of community resources aimed at preventing and responding to elder abuse.

In Hamilton County, the place to start is 421-LIFE (421-5433), the county's 24-hour telephone line for reporting abuse and neglect of the elderly. When it began in 1990, 421-LIFE was one of the country's first centralized elder abuse reporting lines. This month, 421-LIFE celebrates its 15th anniversary.

New brochure available

421-LIFE is operated by the Adult Protective Services division of the Hamilton County Department of Job and Family Services (HCJFS). To observe the anniversary, HCJFS is promoting awareness of 421-LIFE and has produced a new brochure about elder abuse. It helps people identify the signs of elder abuse and explains what to do. The brochure will be available at senior centers, some doctors' offices and HCJFS offices (222 E. Central Parkway and 237 William Howard Taft). Copies are also available by calling 946-2189 or visiting www.hcjfs.org.

Nearly 800 investigations in 2004

Since 1981, Ohio has required counties to investigate all reports of abuse, neglect, self-neglect and exploitation of adults age 60 or older. The reports are handled by the Adult Protective Services divisions of county job and family services agencies.

Frequently Asked Questions about Elder Abuse
Information from the National Center on Elder Abuse and HCJFS Adult Protective Services

1. What is elder abuse?

Elder abuse takes many forms. It includes physical and psychological abuse, neglect, self-neglect and exploitation.

Physical abuse includes, but is not limited to acts of violence such as slapping or beating. Inappropriate use of drugs and physical restraints, force-feeding, and non-consensual sexual contact are also forms of physical abuse.

Psychological abuse is deliberate conduct that causes mental anguish, such as humiliation and threats.

Neglect and self-neglect occur when the daily living needs are not met by the caregiver or older adult. Neglect can be intentional or unintentional. With self-neglect, older adults are unwilling or unable to care for themselves because of mental confusion or physical inability.

Exploitation involves the theft or misuse of money, assets or other valuables. It can be perpetrated by family members, caregivers, sales persons, telephone scams, etc.

Neglect is the most common type of abuse identified.

2. What are the warning signs?

While one sign does not necessarily indicate abuse, some tell-tale signs that there could be a problem are:

1. Bruises, pressure marks, broken bones, abrasions, and burns may be an indication of physical abuse, neglect, or mistreatment.
2. Unexplained withdrawal from normal activities, a sudden change in alertness, and unusual depression may be indicators of emotional abuse.
3. Bruises around the breasts or genital area can occur from sexual abuse.
4. Sudden changes in financial situations may be the result of exploitation.
5. Bedsores, unattended medical needs, poor hygiene, and unusual weight loss are indicators of possible neglect.
6. Behavior such as belittling, threats, and other uses of power and control by spouses are indicators of verbal or emotional abuse.
7. Strained or tense relationships, frequent arguments between the caregiver and elderly person are also signs

Most important is to be alert. The suffering is often in silence. If you notice changes in personality or behavior, you should start to question what is going on.

3. What makes older adults vulnerable to abuse?

Social isolation and mental impairment (such as dementia or Alzheimer's disease) are two factors that may make an older person more vulnerable to abuse. In some situations, studies show that living with someone else (a caregiver or a friend) may increase the chances for abuse to occur. A history of domestic violence may also make a senior more susceptible to abuse.

4. Who are the abusers of older people?

Family members are more often the abusers than any other group. For several years, data showed that adult children were the most common abusers of family members; recent information indicates spouses are the most common perpetrators when state data concerning elders and vulnerable adults is combined. The bottom line is that elder abuse is a family issue.

5. Are there criminal penalties for the abusers?

In Ohio, the Adult Protective Services law (Ohio Revised Code: 5101.60-72) does not itself specify criminal penalties. Criminal penalties for elder abuse and neglect are found in other parts of Ohio law, just as there are criminal penalties for child abuse and neglect. The Adult Protective Services law, however, does allow for fines against mandated reporters who fail to report suspected elder abuse.

6. Can older adults be forced to take help?

No. Mentally competent adults have the right to refuse help and intervention from Adult Protective Services. Adult Protective Services workers cannot make older adults go into nursing homes. In fact, we try to help adults stay in their own homes for as long as they safely can or help them find the least restrictive alternative. Two Adult Protective Services assistants provide temporary part-time services to help clients with routine tasks such as shopping and laundry.

7. Who do I call if I suspect elder abuse?

Each one of us has a responsibility to keep vulnerable elders safe from harm. The laws in most states require helping professions in the front lines -- such as doctors and home health providers -- to report suspected abuse or neglect. These professionals are called mandated reporters.

Call the police or 9-1-1 immediately if someone you know is in immediate, life-threatening danger.

If the danger is not immediate, but you suspect that abuse has occurred or is occurring, please tell someone. Relay your concerns to the local adult protective services (421-LIFE in Hamilton County), long-term care ombudsman, or police.

If you have been the victim of abuse, exploitation, or neglect, you are not alone. Many people care and can help. Please tell your doctor, a friend, or a family member you trust, or call the Eldercare Locator help line immediately.

You can reach the Eldercare Locator by telephone at 1-800-677-1116. Specially trained operators will refer you to a local agency that can help. The Eldercare Locator is open Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Eastern Time. In Hamilton County, call 421-LIFE.

8. What should I expect if I call someone for help?

When making the call, be ready to give the elder's name, address, contact information, and details about why you are concerned.

You may be asked a series of questions to gain more insight into the nature of the situation.

- a. Are there any known medical problems (including confusion or memory loss)?
- b. What kinds of family or social supports are there?
- c. Have you seen or heard incidents of yelling, hitting, or other abusive behavior?

You will be asked for your name, address, telephone number, etc., but most states will take the report even if you do not identify yourself.

9. How can elder abuse be prevented?

Educating seniors, professionals, caregivers, and the public on abuse is critical to prevention. On an individual level, some simple but vital steps to reduce the risk:

- a. Take care of your health.
- b. Seek professional help for drug, alcohol, and depression concerns, and urge family members to get help for these problems.
- c. Attend support groups for spouses and learn about domestic violence services.
- d. Plan for your own future. With a power of attorney or a living will, health care decisions can be addressed to avoid confusion and family problems, should you become incapacitated. Seek independent advice from someone you trust before signing any documents.
- e. Stay active in the community and connected with friends and family. This will decrease social isolation, which has been connected to elder abuse.
- f. Know your rights. If you engage the services of a paid or family caregiver, you have the right to voice your preferences and concerns. If you live in a nursing home or board and care home, call your Long Term Care Ombudsman. The Ombudsman is your advocate and has the power to intervene. All states have adult protective and long-term care ombudsman programs, family care supports, and home and community care services that can help older adults with activities of daily living. Call the [Eldercare Locator](#) at 800-677-1116 for information and referrals on services in your area.

10. How can I help stop elder abuse?

Knowing the warning signs is a first step. Some tips: Become a community "sentinel" - Keep a watchful eye out for loved ones, friends, or neighbors who may be vulnerable. Speak up if you have concerns, even if you are not sure. You have a right to question. Be involved. Volunteer with older adults in your community. Support initiatives to increase and strengthen adult protective services in your state.