

ELDER ABUSE

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Elder abuse is our theme of the month, written for boomers, elders and service providers. We explain risk factors, types and indicators of abuse and provide ideas and tips to reduce stress and tension in care giving. Attorney Wayne K. Ekren of Port Richey Florida writes about elder exploitation, a form of elder abuse. We have included a caregiver abuse screening tool, and a list of questions to routinely ask vulnerable adults. We hope you find this newsletter interesting. If you do, let us know your thoughts and ideas.

Indicators of Possible Elder Mistreatment, Abuse, Neglect or Exploitation

By Vanessa M Dazio, OTD, OTR/L

The most common definition for elder abuse is: "knowing, intentional, or negligent act by any person or a caregiver that causes harm or a serious risk of harm to a vulnerable adult."

The following descriptions are not necessarily proof of abuse, mistreatment, neglect, or exploitation. But they may be clues that a problem exists, or that counseling needs to be offered or a report needs to be made to law enforcement or Adult Protective Services (APS). [Click here to read this useful hand-out describing abuse indicators.](#)



How To Report Suspected Elder Abuse

Contact your local Adult Protective Services (APS) through your state's hotline. The APS agency screens calls for potential seriousness, and it keeps the information it receives confidential. If the agency decides the situation possibly violates state elder abuse laws, it assigns a caseworker to conduct an investigation (in cases of an emergency, usually within 24 hours).

If the victim needs crisis intervention, services are available. If elder abuse is not substantiated, most APS agencies will work as necessary with other community agencies to obtain any social and health services that the older person needs.

The older person has the right to refuse services offered by APS. The APS agency provides services only if the senior agrees or has been declared incapacitated by the court and a guardian has been appointed. The APS agency only takes such action as a last resort.

Here is the States Elder Abuse Hotlines Internet Link. <http://www.elderabusecenter.org/default.cfm?p=statehotlines.cfm>

Other Internet Resources

This is an easy to read brochure about caregiver stress and elder abuse, with a list of resources for help. http://www.elderabusecenter.org/pdf/family/fact_sheet.pdf

The Elder Abuse Awareness Kit <http://www.elderabusecenter.org/pdf/basics/speakers.pdf>



Safety, Health, Injury Prevention



Safety, Health, Injury Prevention

Elder Abuse: Your Legal Options

by Wayne K. Ekren, Esq., Attorney at Law, Elder Friend

Each state in the United States has some form of legislation to protect our elder persons and vulnerable adults from a variety of abusive behaviors.

The Senate Special Committee on Aging estimates there are over 5 million victims of elder abuse a year. However, the amount of reported cases of elder abuse versus unreported cases of elder abuse events is 16% to 84% respectively. The discrepancy is due in part to the fact that elder abuse is considered a "family" concern. Older adults often do not want to report the incident of abuse perpetrated by a family member. Some older adults are so cognitively impaired, they are incapable of reporting abuse.



EXPLOITATION IS ELDER ABUSE

An area that is of great concern to most State legislative bodies is that of exploitation. Exploitation is the illegal taking, misuse or concealment of an elder person's funds, property or assets. Exploitation is about greed and greed can come in all forms from all sources.

There are daily stories in the newspaper, television or radio about someone taking the life savings of an elderly person through some sort of scam. This is exploitation.

What we don't always hear about is the friends, neighbors or relatives that befriend an elderly person only to gain access to the elder person's bank accounts, credit cards, or the deed to the house, then rapidly drawing and depleting those assets without the express permission of the elderly person.

How can an elderly person allow such an obvious money/asset grabbing individual into their lives and pocket books or wallets? It is easy. Often, exploited adults live alone. Along comes a friendly person willing to talk, listen and help the individual in daily life activities such as going to the supermarket, doctor's office, book store, department store, church or restaurants. This friendliness ingratiates the exploiter to the victim. Soon, the exploiter asks for some money, and the exploitive abuse begins. First, it can begin with a small amount of money, then the requests become more frequent. Or, the victim is asked for a large sum of money, or tricked into signing over the deed to the house.

TIPS TO RECOGNIZE POSSIBLE EXPLOITATION

Elders beware! **If it looks to good to be true it probably is too good to be true!** If you are pressured to sign a contract you don't understand or that has a lot of small print you can't read, don't sign anything. An attorney will review and explain the meaning of the contract so you can understand your legal obligations.

The small costs associated with legal fees will be well spent to prevent the potential for losing your home or life savings.

Find a trusted attorney you can call anytime: Avoid being a victim! Find an attorney you can trust, and whom you can call any time to help you before you make any financial commitments to others. If a family member, friend or neighbor tells you, "you don't need a lawyer", you probably need one.

"Elders beware! If it looks to good to be true it probably is too good to be true! "

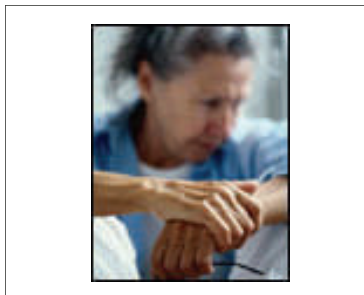
Supporting Caregivers to Prevent Elder Abuse

by Dr. Vanessa

Caregiver stress is the most common cause of elder abuse. The demands of caring for an older, frail, or disabled individual can interfere with all aspects of a caregiver's life, leaving both parties isolated and creating a potentially dangerous situation for the care receiver.

Caring for frail older people can be a very difficult and stress-provoking task. This is particularly true when the

1. care receiver is mentally or physically impaired
2. caregiver is ill prepared for the task,
3. needed resources are lacking.



As stress and frustration levels increase, caregivers may become abusive or demonstrate willful neglect. Read "[10 Tips for Care Getting](#)" to prevent caregiver tension and stress.

Possible Indicators of Abuse from the Caregiver

- Care receiver may not be given the opportunity to see others without the presence of the caregiver (suspected abuser).
- Care receiver may not be given the opportunity to speak for him or herself without the presence of the caregiver (suspected abuser).
- Caregiver blames the care receiver for actions such as incontinence as a deliberate act.
- Caregiver demonstrates aggressive behavior (threats, insults, harassment) toward the care receiver.
- Caregiver demonstrates attitudes of indifference or anger toward the care receiver.
- Caregiver does not offer or provide assistance when needed.
- Conflicting accounts of incidents by family, supporters, or care receiver.
- Flirtations, coyness, etc as possible indicators of inappropriate sexual relationship.
- Inappropriate display of affection by the caregiver.
- Inappropriate or unwarranted defensiveness by caregiver.
- Previous history of abuse of others.
- Problems with alcohol or drugs.
- Social isolation of family, or isolation or restriction of activity of the older adult within the family unit by the caregiver.
- Unwillingness or reluctance by the caregiver to comply with service providers when planning for care and implementation of care.

Abuse Questions to Routinely Ask Mature Adults

Here are some questions recommended by the American Medical Association recommends that doctors routinely ask mature adults about abuse, even if signs are absent. These questions are useful for any service provider working with older adults, or family members to use when involved with vulnerable individuals. Read "[Abuse Questions](#)".

Read the "[Caregiver Abuse Screen](#)" (Reis-Nahmiash CASE)



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Follow-up questions (if abuse is identified)

How long has the abuse been occurring?

Is it an isolated incident?

Why do you think this happens?

When do you think the next episode will occur?

Is it safe for you to return home?

What would you like to see happen?

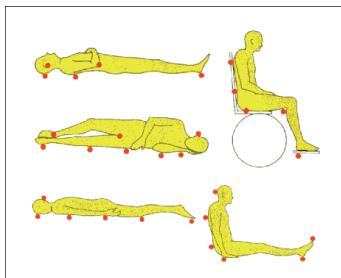
Have you ever received help for this problem before?



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Pressure Ulcers Can Be a Sign of Elder Abuse

Pressure ulcers are areas of injured skin and tissue. Pressure ulcers are also called bed sores, pressure sores and decubitus ulcers. They are usually caused by sitting or lying in one position for too long. This immobility puts pressure on certain areas of the body. The pressure can reduce the blood supply to the skin and the tissues under the skin. When a change in position doesn't occur often enough and the blood supply gets too low, a pressure ulcer may form.



Sites where pressure ulcers occur

This injured skin condition can become so severe that the bone actually becomes exposed, increasing the risk of infection. Pressure ulcers are extremely hazardous and can be life threatening. Pressure ulcers are a telling sign of neglect or elder abuse. It is often an indicator a person has been immobilized for longer than is healthy.

Hazards of Immobility

The body works like a well oiled machine. When all the parts of the machine are maintained properly, the machine will work.

When any one part or combinations of parts are not maintained, the machine will decline rapidly, until one day it just can't function any more.

And so it is, with our own body. The body works together with the nervous, muscular, skeletal, digestive, respiratory, cardiovascular systems. All of these systems are enclosed by our skin. Together, all these "parts" make it possible for us to live and breathe and move around on this earth. The body was built to move. Our bones, joints and muscles need to be active so that every tissue in the body gets nourished regularly.

Inactivity or not moving the body, can cause visible changes to our body within 3-5 days! That isn't long. When the body is allowed to remain inactive, the body will suffer consequences. Here are potential hazards for remaining stationary or being inactive. Read "[Hazards of Immobility](#)".

HOW TO PREVENT PRESSURE SORES

Inactivity or immobility can cause a rapid decline in health. It can even cause death. It is a very serious condition. There are many things that can be done to prevent pressure ulcers from ever happening.

1. **Stay Active:** Change body positions constantly throughout the day and night. Keep the joints and muscles moving by staying physically active. Be sure to move the feet, toes, hips and knees regularly so skin pressure does not happen on the bony part of these joints.
2. **Avoid sitting or lying still for more than two hours at a time.** Stand and walk as often as possible.
3. **Drink plenty of water.** This helps digestion, circulation, bowel movements, the bladder, and the skin.
4. **Eat nutritious foods** rich in fruits and vegetables, and include all food groups.
5. **Keep skin dry.**
6. **Inspect skin regularly to look for pink or reddened areas.**

Resources: <http://www.ahrq.gov/consumer/#sore>

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/bv.fcgi?rid=hstat2.chapter.9527>

*"Inactivity or immobility
can cause a rapid decline
in health."*

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Ask Dr. Vanessa

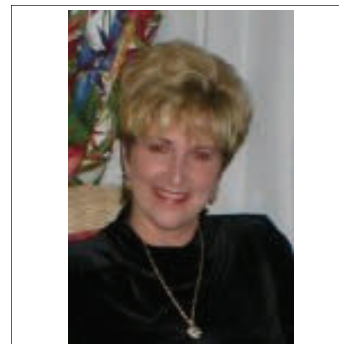
Question: My mother lives alone. She apparently is not eating any food or drinking, doesn't want to talk to any members of our family, and prefers to remain isolated. She refuses to let us visit her. When I saw her yesterday, I was shocked at her condition. She looked far thinner than the last time I saw her. She was dirty, her clothes were a mess, and her hair was not combed. She looked terrible, the yard wasn't mowed, and the house was run down. She would not let me in, and has not answered her phone for weeks. I live out of the area, and drove down here to see her. I can't stay long, I have a job. What should I do?

ANSWER: From your question, it appears that your mother might not be eating as much as she needs for health and nourishment. Her dirty clothing and her physical appearance are potential warning signs of self neglect. Her unwillingness to let you in her house or to talk to you on the phone is another red flag. Her house is getting run down. These are also signs or symptoms of self neglect.

There can be many reasons for such behavior. It will be very important to try to determine the reasons for her run down appearance and reclusive behavior. However, if these behaviors continues, your mother may have a serious health risk. Therefore, it is important to get involved right away.

If you know your mother's doctor, the doctor should be contacted. You can call the Adult Protective Services through the states' hotline. Tell them about your concerns. A caseworker will be assigned to conduct an investigation. In the meantime, continue to try to talk to your mother. If you can get into the home, I urge you to take her to her physician. If she does not have a physician, take her to the emergency room of a local hospital. It is important your mother receive medical attention to determine the cause of your mother's condition and to help her regain her health. Do not let this situation go without seeking outside assistance.

Because you live away from your mother, you might consider hiring a company to monitor your mom's health and well being, or to provide regular services to assure she is eating, taking care of her self and her home. There are many service providers that can help families care for family members. For more information, call SAFE AGING at 727-848-1535, or toll free at 1-866-SAFE AGE (1-866-723-3243).



Dr. Vanessa M. Dazio, OTD

SAFE Aging Offers In Home Monitoring

SAFE Aging has an in-home monitoring service for children of aging, frail or vulnerable parents. This service is provided by a skilled health care professional to give you peace of mind. Depending on your desires, we will make scheduled or random in-home visits, to assure the health and well being of your parent.

SAFE AGING will make in-home quality care visits to monitor outside service providers, for the purpose of assuring the provision of quality care.

For more information, refer to <http://www.safearging.com/consumer/monitoring.htm>