

Chapter 1 Elder Abuse

Three Indisputable Facts about Elder Abuse:

- Other than the victim's age, elder abuse is a crime which is indiscriminate in choosing who it strikes. Factors such as one's socio-economic status, gender, race, ethnicity, educational background and geographic location do not provide an impregnable barrier against its broad, horrible reach.
- Elder abuse victims often live in silent desperation, unwilling to seek assistance because they unfortunately believe their cries for help will go unanswered and they fear retaliation from their abusers. Many remain silent to protect abusive family members from the legal consequences of their crimes, or are too embarrassed to admit that they have fallen victim to predators. Others fear that no one will believe them — chalking up their allegations to the effects of old age.

Thus, it may take the courage of a caring family member, friend or caretaker to take action when the victim may be reluctant.

- With your vigilance, care and cooperation, elder abuse can be stopped and its perpetrators arrested and prosecuted. In the past four years alone, social service and law enforcement resources have expanded dramatically to meet the growing need. **HELP IS AVAILABLE.**



Remember:

**If you suspect abuse,
report it.**

What is Physical and Emotional Elder Abuse?

Physical abuse includes:

- Physical assault
- Sexual assault
- Unreasonable physical constraint
- Prolonged deprivation of food or water
- Inappropriate use of a physical or chemical restraint or psychotropic medication

Neglect includes:

- Failure to assist in personal hygiene
- Failure to provide clothing and shelter
- Failure to provide medical care
- Failure to protect from health and safety hazards
- Failure to prevent malnutrition or dehydration
- Self-neglect

Emotional abuse includes:

- Verbal assaults, threats or intimidation
- Subjecting an individual to fear, isolation or serious emotional distress
- Withholding of emotional support
- Confinement

Recognizing the Warning Signs

The existence of any one or more of these does not necessarily mean that abuse has occurred. Instead, treat them as signs that diligent attention or investigation is needed.

Physical warning signs:

- Uncombed or matted hair
- Poor skin condition or hygiene
- Unkempt or dirty
- Patches of hair missing or bleeding scalp
- Any untreated medical condition
- Malnourished or dehydrated
- Foul smelling
- Torn or bloody clothing or undergarments
- Scratches, blisters, lacerations or pinch marks
- Unexplained bruises or welts
- Burns caused by scalding water, cigarettes or ropes
- Injuries that are incompatible with explanations
- Any injuries that reflect an outline of an object, for example, a belt, cord or hand

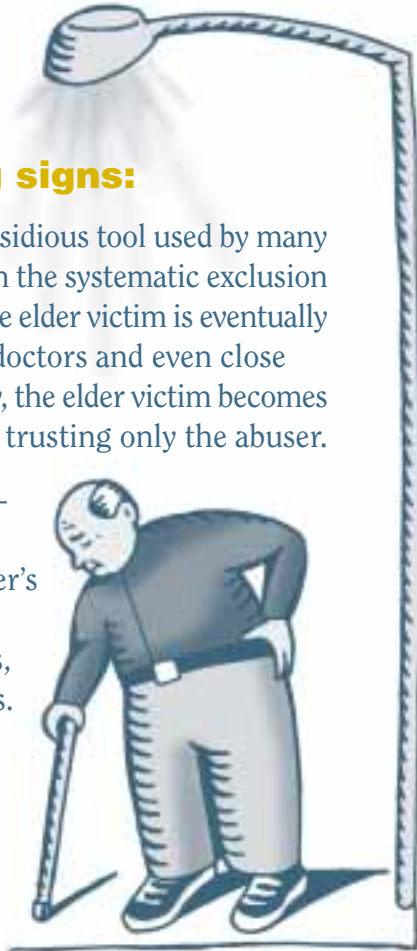
Behavioral warning signs:

- Withdrawn
- Confused or extremely forgetful
- Depressed
- Helpless or angry
- Hesitant to talk freely
- Frightened
- Secretive

Isolation warning signs:

Isolation of an elder is an insidious tool used by many abusers. Accomplished with the systematic exclusion of all real outside contact, the elder victim is eventually driven to distrust friends, doctors and even close family members. Ultimately, the elder victim becomes a pawn – manipulated into trusting only the abuser.

- Family members or caregivers have isolated the elder, restricting the elder's contact with others, including family, visitors, doctors, clergy or friends.
- Elder is not given the opportunity to speak freely or have contact with others without the caregiver being present.



REPORTING ELDER ABUSE:

- Any person who suspects that abuse of an elder has occurred should report it. When in doubt, always err on the side of caution and report.
- Abuse can continue and often escalates if there is no intervention. Known or suspected cases of abuse should be reported to the appropriate agencies or to local law enforcement.
- Intervention can often save the assets, health, dignity or even the life of an elder.

HOW TO REPORT ELDER ABUSE:

- If a known or suspected incident of elder abuse has occurred in a long-term care facility, the report should be made to the local Long-Term Care Ombudsman, the local law enforcement agency or the Bureau of Medi-Cal Fraud and Elder Abuse.*
- If abuse has occurred anywhere other than in a facility, reports should be made to the local county Adult Protective Services agency or to the local law enforcement agency.*
- The reporting person is protected from both criminal and civil liability.

**See chapter 2 (starting on page 20) for more details on how to file a report and how to contact your nearest reporting agency.*