



NATIONAL CENTER ON ELDER ABUSE

Where Faith and Safety Meet

Faith Communities Respond to Elder Abuse

Information for Faith Communities and Faith Leaders
about Elder Abuse and How to Help

CREATED BY:

National Center on Elder Abuse

**Safe Havens Interfaith Partnership Against
Domestic Violence and Elder Abuse**

National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life

Dear Faith Community Leaders and Members:

Through the ages, faith communities¹ have valued older adults, relied on their wisdom, and respected the depth and breadth of their life experiences. However, this respect is not always reflected in all families or in the wider culture. Approximately 10% of older adults in the U.S. experienced emotional, physical, or sexual abuse and/or neglect in the past year, although research suggests that these crimes are significantly underestimated. Only 1 in 24 cases are ever reported to authorities.² Often, the abuser is a family member, caretaker (paid or volunteer), friend, neighbor, banker, lawyer, a person in a position of authority, or a person with whom there is an expectation of trust.

Many people who experience elder abuse turn to their faith communities for help. This may mean talking to a member of the choir, mentioning the abuse to a long-term friend during women's group, men's group, or a scripture study, or asking a faith leader for help. People experiencing elder abuse need and want the support of their faith communities and faith leaders. For many older adults, faith is a valuable resource, an important aspect of identity and community, and an essential element in decision making and healing.

¹ Because elder abuse affects people in all faith traditions, we have used broadly inclusive faith language. Whatever your faith and cultural background, we hope that you will take this broadly inclusive language and translate it into the specifics of your faith or spiritual community. Only you know what language works within your tradition and setting. While honoring our many differences, we seek to focus on one thing faith communities share: the need to provide a safe, effective, faith-based response to older adults who are experiencing elder abuse.

² Burnes, D., Acierno, R., & Hernandez-Tejada, M. (2019). Help-seeking among victims of elder abuse: Findings from the National Elder Mistreatment Study. *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B*, 74(5), 891-896 <https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/gby122>

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Faith community leaders and members know older adults and families well, visit in hospitals, long-term care facilities, and homes, and know when an older adult is unexpectedly absent or when their behavior suddenly changes. This means that faith community members and leaders are in a unique position to recognize elder abuse and help the older adult find safety. Unfortunately, many have not yet received the training and resources they need to respond effectively and safely.

An innovative collaboration between Safe Havens Interfaith Partnership Against Domestic Violence and Elder Abuse (Safe Havens) and the National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life (NCALL) led to the creation of this resource for faith leaders.^{3,4} Recently, the collaboration expanded to include the National Center on Elder Abuse (NCEA) as well. We collaborate because we believe that partnerships between faith community leaders and domestic violence, elder abuse, and sexual assault service providers are critical to providing the physical, emotional, and spiritual care that older adults need and deserve.

The goal of this resource is to help you, trusted faith community members and leaders, support older adults who are experiencing abuse. Ultimately, we hope that the information and resources presented here will help you keep older members of your faith community safe.

Sincerely,

National Center on Elder Abuse

Safe Havens Interfaith Partnership Against Domestic Violence and Elder Abuse

National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life

3 This original project was supported by Grant No. 2008-TA-AX-K052 awarded by the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women.

4 This document was completed for the National Center on Elder Abuse in partnership with Safe Havens Interfaith Partnership Against Domestic Violence and Elder Abuse and the National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life, and is supported in part by a grant (90ABRC0002) from the Administration on Aging, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Grantees carrying out projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their findings and conclusions. Therefore, points of view or opinions do not necessarily represent official Administration on Aging or HHS policy. LAST DOCUMENT REVISION: AUGUST 2024

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“Resolve to be tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving, and tolerant with the weak and the wrong. Sometime in your life you would have been all of these.”

– Dr. Robert H. Goddard

You can download this resource for free at:



National Center on Elder Abuse (NCEA)

WEB: ncea.acl.gov | EMAIL: ncea-info@acl.hhs.gov



Safe Havens Interfaith Partnership Against Domestic Violence and Elder Abuse

WEB: interfaithpartners.org | EMAIL: info@interfaithpartners.org



National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life (NCALL)

WEB: ncall.us | EMAIL: ncall@ncall.us



Introduction

“ ... during a trauma, victims are five times more likely to seek the aid of clergy than any other professional. Clergy are people they know and trust.”⁵

Whatever their faith, language, or culture, many older adults who are experiencing abuse agree that faith is critical to their identity, their understanding of abuse itself, the decisions they make, and their healing. Abuse challenges a survivor’s faith, calling into question fundamental values and assumptions. One survivor commented: “What has been most violated... are intangibles: love, faith, trust, and hope. The result is spiritual suffering and a serious sense of loss and powerlessness.”⁶

Many people turn to their faith communities for help in crisis. And a Canadian study suggests that older adults experiencing abuse are even more likely to be faith-affiliated and to turn to faith communities for help. Author Elizabeth Podnieks stated: “Faith communities can play a critical role in the prevention of elder abuse and neglect by fostering heightened public awareness of elder mistreatment, as well as providing services to abused elders in the community.”⁷

5 Helen P. Bradley, Director of the Victim-Witness Assistance Program in Chatham County, Georgia. Georgia Commission on Family Violence and Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2009 Georgia Domestic Violence Fatality Review Annual Report, p. 33.

6 Elder abuse survivor, Lynn, Massachusetts, December 15, 2009.

7 Elizabeth Podnieks, EdD, RN and Sue Wilson, PhD. Elder Abuse Awareness in Faith Communities: Findings from a Canadian Pilot Study. *Journal of Elder Abuse and Neglect*. Vol. 15, No.3/4, p. 123.

This booklet is designed especially for faith leaders (clergy and lay) and for anyone who participates in a faith community, spiritual gathering, or congregation.

Perhaps:

- You will be the first person to notice something amiss in the life of an older member because you know them so well
- You will notice something during a home, hospital, or nursing home visit that raises concerns
- You will notice that an older person who used to participate regularly is now sporadic or absent, or
- An older adult who is experiencing abuse will ask you for help because you are a trusted member of the community.

In these scenarios, you are on the front lines in responding to elder abuse. While anyone can experience abuse, older adults often keep personal matters private and may not know where to go for help.

The goal of this resource is to provide information that will allow you to:

- Recognize the signs of abuse of an older adult
- Offer safe and helpful support and information
- Know where to turn for assistance



Definitions

You are visiting George, an older member of your faith community, and you learn that an adult grandchild has moved into his home. George seems to be fearful of this grandchild...

You notice that 85-year-old Maria is having financial difficulty now that her son and daughter-in-law are helping her...

You see bruises on Sarah's neck, and she hints that her 25-year marriage has always been "troubled"...

You've just heard that 68-year-old Helen was raped by a neighbor who had been coming into her home to help her...

Your visit to a nursing home reveals that 92-year-old Elena has lost a lot of weight and suddenly has poor personal hygiene...

62-year-old Juan tells you he received an email that said he was inheriting money from a long-lost uncle. He just had to email his bank account number and security code. The next day, his account was cleaned out...

78-year-old Fatima has stopped caring for herself and her apartment, and is now living in miserable circumstances...



In all of these cases, an older adult may be experiencing elder abuse.

Elder abuse happens when someone intentionally acts or fails to act in a way that causes or creates a risk of harm to an older person. Elder abuse includes physical, sexual, emotional, financial, and spiritual abuse. Intentional neglect is also a form of elder abuse. (Self-neglect may also occur, please see below.)

People who abuse older adults include family members, intimate partners, caretakers (paid or volunteer), friends, neighbors, bankers, lawyers, a person in a position of authority, or a person with whom there is an expectation of trust. Most abuse happens in the home.



The people who experience elder abuse are primarily women, but may also be men. Elder abuse affects people of all races, cultures, faiths, sexual orientations, and gender identities. Elder abuse affects us all.

Through a coercive control lens, abuse usually occurs because the perpetrator is using coercion or manipulation to gain some benefit for themselves, such as money, a place to stay, free labor, access to prescription medications, or sexual gratification. The person who abuses may also use isolation, threats, violence, or other tactics to control the older adult. Additionally, some family caregivers, chosen family, or trusted others may cause harm because they are overwhelmed or lack the knowledge, capacity, or resources to adequately and safely care for the older adult.

Self-neglect is the situation most commonly reported to Adult Protective Services (APS) and it may be included in state laws about elder abuse. Financial scams perpetrated by strangers may also be included in state laws regarding elder abuse. Although these are important, the primary focus of this booklet is on willful abuse of an older adult perpetrated by a person with whom there is a relationship or an expectation of trust.

Sexual abuse is particularly hard for faith leaders and older faith community members to talk about. However, sexual abuse does happen, and older adults may need your help if they are experiencing sexual abuse. Sexual abuse perpetrated against older adults includes non-consensual sexual contact of any kind. Sexual contact with any person incapable of giving consent is also considered sexual abuse. This includes, but is not limited to, unwanted touching, all types of sexual assault or battery, and sexually explicit photographing. Those who abuse can be spouses or intimate partners, adult children, family members, caregivers, strangers, or another resident or someone in a position of power in a nursing home, assisted living, or other facility settings. People who perpetrate sexual abuse may target older adults because they believe they won't tell or, if they do tell, they won't be believed.

Elder abuse is defined differently by each state. Some states define “elder” as 60 years and up, while others say 65 years. Sometimes domestic violence and sexual assault service providers use the term “abuse in later life,” which includes individuals 50 and older. Although the definition or the language may change slightly from state to state, remember that the older adult’s experience remains the same: shame, pain, anguish, shortened life span, and poor quality of life.

To look up your state’s elder abuse statutes, visit:

**U.S. Department of Justice Elder Justice Initiative:
State Elder Abuse Statutes**

www.justice.gov/elderjustice/elder-justice-statutes-0

To find your local Adult Protective Services agency, visit:

National Adult Protective Services Association: Help In Your Area

www.napsa-now.org/help-in-your-area



“Wherever clergy are trained, abuse should be at the top of the list.”

– Survivor of elder abuse, Lynn, Massachusetts

Did you know...



ACL's most recent Profile of Older Americans suggests the following: People 65+ represented 17.3% of the population in the year 2022. That percentage is expected to grow to 22% by 2040.⁸



Every year, 10% of older adults in the U.S. experience elder abuse. Research suggests this number is an undercount because many elder abuse cases are unreported.⁹

Elder abuse affects men and women regardless of their education, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical ability, activity level, language, or country of origin. Social isolation, disabilities, and some illnesses associated with aging may make an older adult more vulnerable to abuse.

Those who experience elder abuse often love the people who harm them. They may stay in the abusive situation because of that love. Or, they may want to keep the family together. They might not have the financial resources to leave, or their medical condition (or the medical condition of the abuser) may make living alone too difficult.

8 https://acl.gov/sites/default/files/Profile%20of%20OA/ACL_ProfileOlderAmericans2023_508.pdf

9 Burnes, D., Acierno, R., & Hernandez-Tejada, M. (2019). Help-seeking among victims of elder abuse: Findings from the National Elder Mistreatment Study. *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B*, 74(5), 891-896. <https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/gby122>

Many older adults who are experiencing abuse do not seek services, especially from domestic abuse or sexual assault services. They may consider domestic abuse or sexual assault something that affects only younger people. They may be unable to access services due to physical or mental conditions. They may not know about services, or they may be unwilling to access services. They may have difficulty relating to young shelter staff, participating in programs that prioritize child care or employment, or coping with a shelter stay if there are many children present, limited accommodations for disabilities, or no medical support available.

One study reported: “Social support has emerged as a central risk or protective factor for virtually all forms of elder mistreatment. Moreover, research indicates that social support is linked to improved health and mental health. Programs that enhance and build relationships between older adults and members of their community, that is, programs that act against the age-related forces of isolation (reduced mobility, poorer health, increased morbidity of friends and family) have the potential to yield extremely high benefits.”¹⁰ Clearly, faith communities that maintain contact with their older congregants and thereby decrease isolation are perfectly positioned to help prevent and/or intervene earlier in cases of elder abuse.

You can help!

More than any other demographic group, older adults are actively involved in their faith communities. Faith leaders and members of faith communities are among the few, and in many cases the only, people who visit older community members in homes, hospitals, or assisted living or long-term care facilities.

¹⁰ Acierno, Ron, Melba Hernandez-Tejada, Wendy Muzzy, and Kenneth Steve. National Elder Mistreatment Study. U.S. Department of Justice, 2009. Document No. 226456, Executive Summary, p. 9

Red Flags and Warning Signs

Faith community leaders and members often ask for “red flags,” or warning signs of elder abuse. However, be cautious. Some aspects of aging, such as how easily an older person may bruise, may both mask and/or mimic abuse. Most or all of the red flags need NOT be present for abuse to be occurring. If you see one or two of these indicators, please follow up (privately) with questions.

Someone who might be experiencing elder abuse:

- Has repeated “accidental” injuries
- Has suspicious physical injuries, such as bruises, broken bones, pressure injuries, or burns
- May be unable to follow through on treatment plans or medical care
- Says they are “walking on eggshells”
- Characterizes a loved one as “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde”
- Says or hints at being afraid or harmed
- Makes veiled disclosures, such as “my son has a temper,” or “I have to ask my wife’s permission for everything”
- Suddenly has poor personal hygiene or is not meeting their personal needs
- May experience sleep disturbances
- Considers or attempts suicide
- Is living in unsafe, unsanitary, or hazardous living conditions, including being unhoused
- Misses appointments, meetings, services, or community events unexpectedly
- Has sudden or unexplained changes in lifestyle, choices, or behavior
- Adds new names to their bank accounts, opens new lines of credit, or has unusual or sudden changes in financial transactions or financial institutions
- May be receiving care from someone who might also be at risk or need assistance

Someone who might abuse an older adult:

- May be verbally abusive to the older adult while charming and friendly to others
- Says things like “they’re difficult,” “they’re just stubborn,” “they’re so stupid,” or “they’re clumsy” to convince others that the older person is incompetent or crazy
- May be overly attentive to the older person to mask controlling behaviors
- Controls the older person’s activities and outside contacts
- Talks about the older person as if they are not there or not a person
- Threatens suicide or homicide or both
- Stalks, pursues, follows, or harasses the older adult in a way that would cause a reasonable person to feel fear or emotional distress and serves no legitimate purpose
- Sabotages the older person’s efforts to attend services, meetings, events, or appointments by refusing to provide transportation or by some other means.

Sometimes, you will not be able to observe any of these red flags, or the indicators may be explained by other causes. No single indicator can be taken as conclusive proof. Look for patterns or clusters of indicators that suggest a problem. If you are concerned, please follow up privately with questions to find out more.

“A test of a people is how it behaves toward the old ... the affection and care for the old ... [is] the true gold mine of a culture.”

– Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

How You Can Find Out More

If you are concerned that someone you know may be experiencing elder abuse, you will want to find out more. Lead into questions about abuse with a statement such as, “People are sometimes hurt by family members, friends, neighbors, and others. For this reason, I always ask questions about relationships.”

Here are some questions you can ask to find out more:

- Does anyone spend time with you, take you shopping, or to the doctor?
- Are you helping to support someone?
- Do you have enough privacy at home?
- Are you sad or lonely? Why?
- Do you feel uncomfortable with anyone in your family or in your care facility?
- Has anyone taken things that belong to you without your permission?
- Are you getting out with your friends?
- Are you afraid of anyone?
- Have you ever been hurt in any way by anyone? Are you being hurt by anyone now?
- Does anyone threaten you or force you to do things you do not want to do?
- Have you ever been touched in ways that made you feel uncomfortable? Is this going on now?
- Who makes decisions about your life, such as how or where you should live?
- Who controls your finances and makes financial decisions? How is that working?
- Who helps you with personal care? How is that going?
- You mentioned your son has a problem with his temper. What happens when he gets mad?

If the answers to these questions raise concern:

- Ask for more information.
- Ask questions such as, “How are you staying safe?”
- Get more information (see [Safe Havens Linktree](#)).
- Connect the older adult who is experiencing abuse to resources and services.

Even if the answers to these questions do not raise concerns, tell the person that if an intimate partner, family member, caregiver (paid or volunteer), friend, neighbor, fiduciary, banker, lawyer, or anyone else ever does hurt them or they know someone who is being hurt, there are people who can help, including you.

“The thing we want clergy to do is listen. It takes so much energy, strength, and courage to speak up. When a victim is ready to speak, clergy HAVE to listen. Clergy shouldn’t say, ‘we’re out of time,’ or ‘I have a meeting.’”

– Survivor of elder abuse, Lynn, Massachusetts



How You Can Respond

Older adults are often firmly rooted in their faith communities. A faith community can be a place of refuge for an older adult who is experiencing abuse. It may be the first time they ask for help. A faith community can be a place where someone experiencing abuse learns that the abuse is not their fault, that they don't deserve the abuse, that others care about them, and that there are service providers in the community who can help.

Also remember that perceptions of what abuse is as well as a congregant's ability to seek help are shaped by culture and by experiences in past relationships. It's important to empower older adults and to encourage self-determination and autonomy by respecting their decision-making, values, and goals.

If an older adult who is experiencing abuse reaches out to you for help, you can:

- Listen with compassion and without judgment.
- Believe them! Usually, the initial description of the abuse is only the tip of the iceberg.
- Be available to hear the whole story, in the older adult's own words. Give them time to think about what they want to say next. You may be the first person they have ever confided in.
- Affirm the older adult's right to safety. Affirm that their safety is your first concern.
- Reassure them that the abuse is NOT their fault.
- Reassure them that the abuse is not part of a divine plan for their life.
- Respond to faith questions that they may be confronting. Point out ways that their faith may be a resource over the coming weeks and months as they make decisions, respond to the crisis, and consider options for their safety.
- Offer spiritual and other needed forms of support. Reassure them that their faith community is with them during this crisis, and that you are supportive and will help.
- Help them connect to a domestic violence advocate, sexual assault service provider, or elder advocate who can help plan for safety, provide needed services and support, and talk about options.

Keep all information shared by the older adult CONFIDENTIAL unless you have their express permission to reveal information to a particular person for a particular purpose OR you are a mandated reporter and must report elder abuse. If you are a mandated reporter, begin all sessions by reminding the older adult experiencing abuse that you are a mandated reporter of elder abuse.

To find out if you are a mandated reporter in your state:



**U.S. Department of Justice Elder Justice Initiative (EJI):
State Elder Abuse Statutes**

www.justice.gov/elderjustice/elder-justice-statutes-0

Within your faith community, you and others can:

- Talk about elder abuse so people feel safe telling their stories.
- Include resource information in your bulletin or newsletter.
- Put informational posters up in the bathrooms where they can be read in private.
- Educate everyone in the congregation about the warning signs and where to get help.
- Speak out. Preach about elder abuse. Name it as something that breaks relationships and covenants in our families and communities.
- Suggest ways that your faith tradition supports, honors, and respects older adults.
- Get to know your local domestic violence and sexual assault service advocates, and the elder abuse services in your area. Know their work, and have brochures and other materials available.
- If there is a multi-disciplinary team (MDT) in your area that responds to elder abuse, reach out to them and establish a connection.

For more about Multi-Disciplinary Teams in your area, visit:



Elder Justice Initiative

www.justice.gov/elderjustice/mdt

Please do not...

- **Please do not tell the older adult what to do. Instead, offer options and let them decide on their own next step. Trying to make changes or attempting to leave can be the most dangerous time for someone experiencing abuse.**
- **Please do not blame the person experiencing abuse. Abuse is never the fault of the person who is experiencing abuse.**
- **Please do not break confidentiality by sharing information with the person perpetrating the abuse, other family members, or anyone else, unless you are a mandated reporter and must report the abuse (see [page 22](#)).**
- **Please do not provide couple's, marriage, or family counseling, which can be dangerous and is not recommended.**
- **Please do not offer quick solutions or minimize the complexities and challenges of the situation.**

Where you can turn for more information and services...

Since elder abuse is inclusive of domestic violence and sexual assault, older survivors may seek support from domestic and sexual violence service agencies. However, it can be easy for older adults who are experiencing abuse to “slip through the cracks,” or for their needs to be overlooked or not met. Service agencies vary in their staff training and capacity to respond to the needs of older adults. Please be proactive. Get to know these service providers in advance. Ask them what services they provide for older adults who may be abused. Find out where there are services that welcome and accommodate older adults. Attend a Domestic Violence, Sexual Abuse, and/or Elder Abuse Forum or Roundtable in your community to find out more about services that are available. Offer to help connect the older adult to services and support.

“The ideal Muslim family is one that considers its elderly members worthy of great respect and honor. Gratitude toward [the divine] is based on gratitude toward people. The elderly should be engaged, not isolated; protected, not abused.”

– Imam Magid

Domestic Violence Services

Most domestic violence service agencies are nonprofit organizations that provide services for people who have experienced domestic violence and their families. Many of these agencies have a 24-hour hotline that is answered by advocates. Usually, callers do not have to give their names. Anyone (including you) can call to get information and/or referrals to other services. Services are free, and are available even if the person who experienced abuse is not in a shelter or safe home.

Advocates in domestic violence service agencies can help identify options that may be available in your community to help people stay safe. Some advocates may be required to report to the authorities if you disclose physical abuse and/or neglect of an older adult. It is important to ask the advocates if they are mandated reporters before you discuss the abuse.

Domestic violence advocates can often assist with legal issues (including emergency restraining orders), emergency housing, and safety planning. They may accompany a person who is experiencing abuse to court, medical appointments, and other necessary appointments to provide emotional support. They may also offer individual counseling and often have a support group. They may be able to help with finding permanent housing, finding an attorney, and referrals for food and other assistance.

National Domestic Violence Hotline

1-800-799-7233/SAFE

Confidential and toll-free, 24/7. Language access is available.

thehotline.org



Sexual Abuse and Assault Services

Sexual abuse and assault services are also nonprofit organizations that provide services for people who have experienced sexual assault and/or sexual abuse. Many have a 24-hour hotline that is answered by advocates. Anyone can call anonymously to get information and referrals. Services are free. Sexual abuse and assault advocates can provide support and information, help older adults navigate law enforcement and medical institutions, and provide support during an investigation. Support groups are often available, and advocates can help the person experiencing sexual abuse access needed services in the community.

National Sexual Assault Hotline (RAINN)

1-800-656-4673/HOPE

Confidential and toll free 24/7 in English or Spanish

www.rainn.org/resources



Adult Protective Services (APS)

Adult Protective Services (APS) or elder abuse services are governmental agencies that investigate allegations of abuse, neglect, and exploitation against older adults and/or vulnerable adults (as defined by state statute). States vary in terms of the types of cases that are investigated and services that are offered. States also vary in terms of the ages at which an adult is considered an older adult.

For more information about how to contact an elder abuse or social services agency, visit:

National Adult Protective Services Association

www.napsa-now.org

National Center on Elder Abuse

ncea.acl.gov

Eldercare Locator

1-800-677-1116

eldercare.acl.gov



Aging Network Services

Aging Network Services include programs such as Area Agencies on Aging, Senior Centers, and Councils on Aging that provide in-home and community services, support programs and assistance to older adults. Services available in most communities include nutrition services, transportation, caregiver support, employment and volunteer services, and adult day care services. Many also include in-home care coordination such as nursing services, home care and chore services, home delivered meals, personal care, and Medicaid services.

To locate services near you, visit:



Eldercare Locator

1-800-677-1116

eldercare.acl.gov

For information, support and resources to help family caregivers and the people receiving their care, visit:

Family Caregiver Alliance

www.caregiver.org

Caregiver Action Network Help Desk

1-855-227-3640

www.caregiveraction.org/helpdesk

People living with dementia and their caregivers can access support and information from:

Alzheimer's Association 24/7 Helpline

1-800-272-3900

www.alz.org/help-support

Long-Term Care Ombudsmen

Long-term Care Ombudsmen investigate and, when possible, resolve complaints made by or on behalf of residents of long-term care facilities.

To find the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program in your state, visit:



National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care

theconsumervoice.org/get_help

Legal Remedies

Legal remedies may also be available to an older adult because many of the behaviors that comprise elder abuse are also crimes. An attorney can help the older adult think through civil and criminal remedies. A civil attorney can help with wills, restraining orders, or establishing a new power of attorney.

For legal resources for professionals and consumers, visit:



The American Bar Association Commission on Law and Aging

www.americanbar.org/groups/law_aging

To reach local legal aid, visit:

Legal Services Corporation (LSC)

www.lsc.gov

A Word About Mandated Reporting

As you learn more about elder abuse, including domestic violence and sexual assault, you will become aware of situations where an older adult is being abused. If you are a faith leader, you need to be familiar with your state's mandatory reporting requirements. Please visit the Department of Justice's Elder Justice Initiative for more information at www.justice.gov/elderjustice/elder-justice-statutes-0.

Here are some additional helpful pointers:

- Always put the safety of the older adult first.
- Mandatory reporting laws differ from state to state. Find out now if you are mandated to report elder or dependent adult abuse.
- If you are a mandated reporter, find out for whom reports are mandated (vulnerable, dependent, or at-risk adults? anyone over the age of 60 or 65?)
- If you are a mandated reporter, where do you report the abuse? What information will be needed?
- Learn your denomination's or faith community's policy on elder abuse. If they do not have one, help them to develop one!
- If you are a mandated reporter, let everyone in your congregation know so that they can make informed decisions about what to talk to you about.

“Our society must make it right and possible for old people not to fear the young or be deserted by them. For the test of a civilization is the way it cares for its [older] members.”

– Pearl S. Buck

Safety Planning

Ideally, the older adult you are assisting will be working with a domestic violence, sexual assault, or elder abuse services advocate or an Adult Protective Services worker to develop a safety plan. If not, encourage them to get help from such an organization (see p. 18), where the older adult will find experts who understand abuse, safety planning, and other issues.

Safety planning is critically important and best administered by an expert. Advocates can help an older adult figure out how to be safer during a violent or dangerous incident, how to be safer while remaining in the abusive situation, how to leave in as safe a way as possible, and how to address the topic with children or grandchildren. If an older adult requests your help in thinking about their safety, please contact your local service providers and work with them to provide that assistance.

Sometimes, you may find yourself in a situation where you have to help an older adult who is experiencing abuse think about safety without the help of an expert. Below are safety-planning pointers. Remember that your definition of safety and the older adult's definition of safety may be different. Also remember to let the older adult make the decisions. They know best what will work in their situation.

For additional information on safety planning, visit:

National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life (NCALL)

www.ncall.us



If a violent or dangerous incident may occur, the older adult could...

- Plan a safe place to go.
- Plan a primary and backup escape route out of the home.
- Practice getting out of the home safely. If the older adult has a disability that impacts their mobility, plan how best to escape or who to call for help.
- Arrange a signal with a trusted friend or neighbor.
- Keep purse, keys, and/or wallet in a secure place ready to leave suddenly.

During a violent or dangerous incident, an older adult could...

- Try to avoid rooms that have only one exit (like bathrooms).
- Be aware of items in the home that could be used as weapons, such as guns, knives, and even cords, which could be used for strangulation.
- If attacked, curl up to protect head and heart.

After a violent or dangerous incident, the older adult could...

- Call law enforcement or 911.
- Call a domestic violence hotline to discuss options, plan for safety, and locate accessible support.
- Get medical help, if needed.
- Consider seeking an order of protection.
- Take care of physical needs, and ask for assistance if necessary.
- Get emotional support from a support group or from a trusted friend.
- Get spiritual support from a faith leader or trusted friend. Read or listen to scripture, books, music, or poems that strengthen and encourage. If safe to do so, reconnect with grounding or sustaining rituals or traditions.

Important Contacts

Police

If you are in danger and want law enforcement to respond, call **911** or local police:

National Domestic Violence Hotline

1-800-799-SAFE (7233) | TTY: 1-800-787-3224

www.thehotline.org

National Sexual Assault Hotline

1-800-656-HOPE (4673)

www.rainn.org

Alzheimer's Association 24/7 Helpline

1-800-272-3900

www.alz.org/help-support/resources/helpline

Local domestic abuse services provider: _____

Local sexual assault services provider: _____

Local Adult Protective Services Program: _____

Local Senior Center or Council on Aging: _____

Local Long-Term Care Ombudsman: _____

Eldercare Locator

1-800-677-1116

eldercare.acl.gov

National Elder Fraud Hotline

1-833-872-8311

ovc.ojp.gov/program/stop-elder-fraud/providing-help-restoring-hope

Stronghearts Native Helpline

1-844-762-8483

www.strongheartshelpline.org

GLBT National Senior Hotline

1-888-234-7243

www.lgbthotline.org/senior-hotline

National Center on Elder Abuse

The national clearinghouse for information and resources on research, training, education, policy, and best practices on elder abuse intervention

1-855-500-ELDR (3537)

ncea.acl.gov

National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life

The nationally recognized leader on program and policy development, technical assistance, and training.

1-608-255-0539

www.ncall.us

Safe Havens Interfaith Partnership Against Domestic Violence and Elder Abuse

National technical assistance on the response of faith communities to elder abuse, faith-based resources, and faith-based training.

www.interfaithpartners.org

OTHER IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

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