

# NCEA Why Should I Care About Elder Abuse?

National Center on Elder Abuse

*Elder abuse is an under recognized problem with devastating and even life threatening consequences.*

Every day, headlines throughout the U.S. paint a grim picture of seniors who have been abused, neglected, and exploited, often by people they trust the most. Abusers may be spouses, family members, personal acquaintances, or professionals in positions of trust, or opportunistic strangers who prey on the vulnerable.

How big is the problem? Research indicates that more than one in ten elders may experience some type of abuse, but only one in 23 cases are reported. This means that very few seniors who have been abused get the help they need.

One thing is for certain: elder abuse can happen to any older individual – your neighbor, your loved one – it can even happen to you.

## What is Elder Abuse?

In general, elder abuse refers to intentional or neglectful acts by a caregiver or “trusted” individual that lead to, or may lead to, harm of a vulnerable elder. Physical abuse; neglect; emotional or psychological abuse; verbal abuse and threats; financial abuse and exploitation; sexual abuse; and abandonment are considered forms of elder abuse. In many states, self-neglect is also considered mistreatment.

## Who is at Risk?

Elder abuse can occur anywhere – in the home, in nursing homes, or other institutions. It affects seniors across all socio-economic groups, cultures, and races. Based on available information, women and “older” elders are more likely to be victimized. Dementia is a significant risk factor. Mental health and substance abuse issues – of both abusers and victims – are risk factors. Isolation can also contribute to risk.

## What Should I Do if I Suspect Elder Abuse?

### » REPORT YOUR CONCERNS

*Remember: Most cases of elder abuse go undetected. Don't assume that someone has already reported a suspicious situation.* To report suspected abuse in the community, contact your local Adult Protective Services agency. For state reporting numbers, visit the **NCEA** website at [www.ncea.aoa.gov](http://www.ncea.aoa.gov) or call the **Eldercare Locator** at **1-800-677-1116**.

» IF YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW IS IN A LIFE THREATENING SITUATION OR IMMEDIATE DANGER, contact **911** or the local police or sheriff.

» TO REPORT SUSPECTED ABUSE IN A NURSING HOME OR LONG-TERM CARE FACILITY, contact your state specific agency. To find the listing, visit the **Long Term Care Ombudsman** website. [www.ltcombudsman.org/ombudsman](http://www.ltcombudsman.org/ombudsman)

## TYPES OF ELDER ABUSE

- **Physical abuse:** Use of force to threaten or physically injure an elder
- **Emotional abuse:** Verbal attacks, threats, rejection, isolation, or belittling acts that cause or could cause mental anguish, pain, or distress to a senior
- **Sexual abuse:** Sexual contact that is forced, tricked, threatened, or otherwise coerced upon an elder, including anyone who is unable to grant consent
- **Exploitation:** Theft, fraud, misuse or neglect of authority, and use of undue influence as a lever to gain control over an older person's money or property
- **Neglect:** A caregiver's failure or refusal to provide for a vulnerable elder's safety, physical, or emotional needs
- **Abandonment:** Desertion of a frail or vulnerable elder by anyone with a duty of care
- **Self-neglect:** An inability to understand the consequences of one's own actions or inaction, which leads to, or may lead to, harm or endangerment

*Remember: You do not need to prove that abuse is occurring; it is up to the professionals to investigate the suspicions.*

**Together, we have the power to prevent elder abuse.**

## WARNING SIGNS

- **Physical Abuse:** Slap marks, unexplained bruises, most pressure marks, and certain types of burns or blisters, such as cigarette burns
- **Neglect:** Pressure ulcers, filth, lack of medical care, malnutrition or dehydration
- **Emotional Abuse:** Withdrawal from normal activities, unexplained changes in alertness, or other unusual behavioral changes
- **Sexual Abuse:** Bruises around the breasts or genital area and unexplained sexually transmitted diseases
- **Financial Abuse/Exploitation:** Sudden change in finances and accounts, altered wills and trusts, unusual bank withdrawals, checks written as “loans” or “gifts” and loss of property

The NCEA is a national resource center that provides technical support and information to professionals and advocates working on behalf of older individuals. It also provides information and referrals to the public. The NCEA is not an investigation, nor a reporting, agency and cannot intervene in local cases of suspected elder mistreatment.



## What Can I Do to Prevent Elder Abuse?

- » **REPORT SUSPECTED MISTREATMENT** to your local Adult Protective Services agency or law enforcement. Although a situation may have already been investigated, if you believe circumstances are getting worse, continue to speak out.
- » **KEEP IN CONTACT** – Talk with your older friends, neighbors, and relatives. Maintaining communication will help decrease isolation, a risk factor for mistreatment. It will also give them a chance to talk about any problems they may be experiencing.
- » **BE AWARE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF ABUSE** – Look around and take note of what may be happening with your older neighbors and acquaintances. Do they seem lately to be withdrawn, nervous, fearful, sad, or anxious, especially around certain people, when they have not seemed so in the past?
- » **CONTACT YOUR LOCAL AREA AGENCY ON AGING OFFICE** to identify local programs and sources of support, such as *Meals on Wheels*. These programs help elders to maintain health, well-being, and independence – a good defense against abuse.
- » **VOLUNTEER** – There are many local opportunities to become involved in programs that provide assistance and support for seniors.
- » **OBSERVE WORLD ELDER ABUSE AWARENESS DAY** – Elder abuse is a global issue. Contact your local aging services organizations to find out how your community will observe World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (commemorated on June 15 every year). Help to raise awareness by talking about the issue.
- » **LEARN MORE ABOUT THE ISSUE** – Visit the National Center on Elder Abuse website at [www.ncea.aoa.gov](http://www.ncea.aoa.gov).

## For More Information

- » **NCEA**  
Go to [www.ncea.aoa.gov](http://www.ncea.aoa.gov)
- » **ELDERCARE LOCATOR**  
Call **1-800-677-1116** or go to [www.eldercare.gov](http://www.eldercare.gov)
- » **NATIONAL LONG TERM CARE OMBUDSMAN RESOURCE CENTER**  
Go to [www.ltombudsman.org](http://www.ltombudsman.org)
- » **NATIONAL ADULT PROTECTIVE SERVICES RESOURCE CENTER**  
Go to [www.apsnetwork.org](http://www.apsnetwork.org)



This fact sheet was produced by the National Center on Elder Abuse (NCEA). Portions were adapted from the NCEA publication: 15 Questions & Answers about Elder Abuse (July 2005). NCEA activities are supported in part by grants from the Administration on Aging, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (the University of Delaware (90-AM-3146); National Adult Protective Services Foundation (90-AM-3144); National Committee for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (90-AM-3145) and the University of CA, Irvine (90-AB-0002)). Grantees undertaking 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 policy.

**Together, we have the power to prevent elder abuse.**