

## Elder Abuse: Know the Signs

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When most people get older, they have to rely more on others to help take care of themselves. That brings a greater chance someone will mistreat them or take advantage of them. That's called elder abuse.

Elder abuse is when someone harms or neglects a person age 60 or older. It can happen to anyone. It can come from a caregiver, a family member, or a neighbor. It can take place in the older person's home, the home of a relative, or in an [assisted living](#) or nursing facility.

Older people living with abuse may be afraid or embarrassed to talk about it. But if you keep your [eyes](#) open and know what to look for, you can help make sure your friends and loved ones stay safe.

### Types of Elder Abuse

It can happen in different ways:

**Physical abuse** is any action that causes injury or bodily harm. It can include hitting, shoving, kicking, or burning an older person, tying him to a bed or wheelchair, locking him in a room, or giving him [drugs](#) his doctor hasn't prescribed.

Often this kind of abuse shows up as visible injuries. But there may be other signals, including:

- Unexplained [burns](#), cuts, [bruises](#), and bleeding
- Sprained or broken bones
- Injuries that happen over and over
- The person doesn't want to see a doctor about his wounds

**Sexual abuse** is when an older person is forced to have sexual contact with another person. It can range from making the person watch pornography or take off his clothes to inappropriate touching and rape.

Watch for signs of this kind of abuse in your loved one's actions or his [relationships](#) with you and others. He might:

- Act withdrawn or frightened
- Have changes in his behavior that you can't explain
- Rock back and forth, suck, or mumble to himself
- Be depressed, confused, or lose interest in things he enjoyed
- Have [trouble sleeping](#)

**Financial abuse** is when an older person's money or property are threatened. Someone might use his credit cards or bank accounts without his permission, forge signatures, or force him to change a legal document like a will or power of attorney.

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- Withdrawals from bank accounts that your loved one can't explain
- A new "friend" who may be taking financial advantage of him
- Legal documents that have been changed or disappeared

**First, try talking privately with the person** you suspect is in trouble. You can start by saying you think something is wrong and you want to help. If he won't answer your questions, it's possible that he is being abused. If he tells you someone's hurting him or you suspect he's in immediate danger, call 911.

- Missing financial statements
- Unpaid bills, utilities that are shut off, or threats of eviction
- Signatures that seem to be forged

**Neglect** happens when caregivers don't tend to an older person's needs. It can mean not giving him enough food, [water](#), clothing, housing, and medications or not helping him bathe, dress, or pay the bills. Abandoning the person completely is also a type of abuse. Sometimes a caregiver knows he's neglecting the person, but others may not know they're doing anything wrong.

If an older person isn't getting the care he needs, you may notice:

- He's messy or unclean. He might have dirty clothes, unkempt [hair](#), or [skin rashes](#).
- He loses weight suddenly or isn't hungry anymore.
- Bedsores
- Missing or broken [dentures](#), [eyeglasses](#), [hearing aids](#), or walkers

## **What You Can Do**

If you see any of these signs in a loved one, friend, or neighbor, speak up right away. It could save the person's life.

There are groups that can step in to help older people who are in danger.

**If the problem isn't urgent, contact Adult Protective Services** in the state where he lives. You don't need proof of the abuse to make the call. The agency will send someone to the person's home to check out the report and, if necessary, take steps to make sure he's safe.

There are also national, state, and local agencies that can help older people with emotional, legal, and financial problems.

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Adult Protective Services Phone numbers:

Sussex County: 973-383-3600

Essex County: 866-903-6287

Warren County: 908-475-6591

For a full list of NJ Department of Human Services visit:

<https://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/doas/home/adultpsp.html>

Information provided by: <https://www.webmd.com/healthy-aging/elder-abuse-signs#3>