

Share:    

# Elder Abuse

[Español](#)

On this page:

- [Types of abuse](#)
- [Who is being abused?](#)
- [Money matters](#)
- [What are signs of abuse?](#)
- [Who can help?](#)
- [Caregiver stress and finding support](#)
- [What is the long-term effect of abuse?](#)

Abuse can happen to anyone, no matter the person's age, sex, race, religion, or ethnic background. Each year, hundreds of thousands of adults over the age of 60 are abused, neglected, or financially exploited. This mistreatment is called elder abuse.

Abuse can happen anywhere, including in the older person's home, a family member's home, an assisted living facility, or a nursing home. The mistreatment of older adults can be by family members, strangers, health care providers, caregivers, or friends.

## Types of abuse

There are many types of abuse:

- **Physical abuse** happens when someone causes bodily harm; for example, by hitting, pushing, or slapping. Physical abuse may also include restraining an older adult against their will, such as by locking them in a room or tying them to furniture.
- **Emotional abuse**, sometimes called psychological abuse, can include a caregiver saying hurtful words, yelling, threatening, or repeatedly ignoring the older adult. Keeping that person from seeing close friends and relatives is another form of emotional abuse.
- **Neglect** occurs when the caregiver does not try to respond to the older adult's needs. Neglect may include ignoring physical, emotional, and social needs, or withholding food, medications, or access to health care.
- **Abandonment** is leaving an older adult who needs help alone without planning for their care.
- **Sexual abuse** involves forcing an older adult to watch or be part of sexual acts.
- **Financial abuse** happens when money or belongings are misused or stolen from an older adult. It can include forging checks, taking someone else's retirement or Social Security benefits, withholding access to money or

financial information, or using a person's credit cards and bank accounts without their permission. It also includes changing names on a will, bank account, life insurance policy, or title to a house without permission.



## Who is being abused?

Abuse can happen to any older adult. Most victims of abuse are women, but some are men. Older adults without family or friends nearby and people with disabilities, [memory problems](#), or [dementia](#) may be more vulnerable to abuse. Mistreatment most often affects those who depend on others for help with activities of everyday life — including bathing, dressing, and [taking medicine](#).

## Money matters

Older adults and caregivers should keep an eye out for financial abuse. Even someone a person has never met can steal their financial information using the telephone, internet, or email.

In addition to the theft of money or belongings, financial abuse also includes:

- **Financial neglect:** ignoring or avoiding an older adult's financial responsibilities, such as paying rent or mortgage, medical expenses or insurance, utility bills, or property taxes.
- **Financial exploitation:** the misuse, mismanagement, or exploitation of property, belongings, or assets. This form of financial abuse includes using an older adult's assets without consent, under false pretenses, or through intimidation or manipulation.
- **Health care fraud:** a form of financial abuse committed by health care providers, hospital staff, or other health care workers. It includes intentionally overcharging, billing twice for the same service, charging for care that wasn't provided, or falsifying Medicaid or Medicare claims.

## What are signs of abuse?

You may see signs of abuse or neglect when you visit an older adult at home or in a residential facility. An older person might be a victim of abuse if they:

- Become withdrawn or act agitated or violent
- Display signs of trauma such as rocking back and forth
- Have unexplained pressure marks, bruises, burns, cuts, or scars
- Develop preventable conditions such as bedsores (open sores that can develop when a person stays in one position for a long time, such as being confined to a bed)
- Have hazardous, unsafe, or unclean living conditions
- Look messy, with unwashed hair, dirty clothes, or poor dental hygiene
- Lack personal health care items such as glasses, a walker, dentures, or hearing aid
- Have sudden and unexpected financial losses or unpaid bills despite having adequate financial resources

Watch for a pattern that might suggest a problem, and seek help if you are concerned.

## How can you help spot elder abuse if you live far away?

From a distance, it can be hard to assess the quality of a family member's care.

Ideally, if there is a primary caregiver on the scene, they can keep tabs on how things are going. Or perhaps you can ask a friend or neighbor to stop by unannounced to check on the older adult.

Stay in touch with the older adult and take note of any comments or mood changes that might indicate neglect or mistreatment. Talk to someone who can act on your behalf. That might be the person's doctor, your contact at a home health agency, or a geriatric care manager. If you feel that your family member is in immediate danger, call 911.



[Share this infographic](#) about how to spot the signs of elder abuse.

## Who can help?

If you think someone you know is being abused — physically, emotionally, or financially — talk with them when the two of you are alone. You could say you think something is wrong and you're worried. Offer to take them to get help, for instance, at a local adult protective services agency.

Most importantly, if you suspect an older person is being abused, report what you see to an authority. Many older adults are too ashamed to report mistreatment. Or they're afraid if they make a report, it will get back to the abuser and make the situation worse. Therefore, family and friends must step in to address any problems. Most states also require that doctors and lawyers report elder mistreatment.

Some types of elder abuse may be criminal. You do not personally need to prove that abuse is occurring; professionals will investigate. Many local, state, and national social service agencies can help. These include:

- **Adult Protective Services** programs help protect vulnerable adults from abuse, neglect, and exploitation. The National Adult Protective Services Association provides phone numbers for programs in each state on its [website](#) or by calling **202-370-6292**.
- **The National Center on Elder Abuse** provides guidance on how to report abuse, where to get help, and state laws that deal with abuse and neglect. Visit the Center [online](#) or call **855-500-3537** for more information.
- **Long-term care ombudsmen** advocate for the needs of people who live in assisted living facilities, board and care homes, and nursing homes. They are trained to help resolve problems. Find a long-term care ombudsman in your state [online](#) or by calling **202-332-2275**.

**If you think someone is in urgent danger, call 911.**

## Caregiver stress and finding support

Caring for an older adult can be rewarding. It can also be demanding and stressful. A caregiver under stress might not even realize he or she is being neglectful or abusive.

If you are a caregiver, make time to rest and take care of your own needs. Ask a family member or friend to help for a weekend, or even for a few hours. Churches, synagogues, and other faith-based organizations in your community may have volunteers who can visit and help on a regular basis.

Respite care can also provide a break for caregivers. This care can be arranged for an afternoon or for several days or weeks. Visit the ARCH National Respite Network and Resource Center's [National Respite Locator Service](#) to find respite services in your area.

## What is the long-term effect of abuse?

Most physical wounds heal in time. But elder abuse can lead to early death, cause harm to physical and psychological health, destroy social and family ties, lead to devastating financial loss, and more.

Any type of mistreatment can leave the abused person feeling fearful and depressed. Sometimes, the victim thinks the abuse is their fault. Adult protective service agencies can suggest support groups and counseling that can help the abused person heal the emotional wounds.

## You may also be interested in

- Finding out the [signs that an aging parent needs help](#)
- Learning more about [respite care](#)
- Reading tips for [taking care of yourself as a caregiver](#)

## Sign up for caregiving tips from NIA

\*Email Address

Subscribe

## For more information about elder abuse and where to get help

### Consumer Financial Protection Bureau

Office for Older Americans

855-411-2372

[olderamericans@cfpb.gov](mailto:olderamericans@cfpb.gov)

[www.consumerfinance.gov/practitioner-resources/resources-for-older-adults](http://www.consumerfinance.gov/practitioner-resources/resources-for-older-adults)

### Eldercare Locator

800-677-1116

[eldercarelocator@USAging.org](mailto:eldercarelocator@USAging.org)

<https://eldercare.acl.gov>

### National Center on Elder Abuse

855-500-3537

[ncea-info@aoa.hhs.gov](mailto:ncea-info@aoa.hhs.gov)

<https://ncea.acl.gov>

### National Elder Fraud Hotline

833-FRAUD-11 for 833-372-8311

<https://ovc.ojp.gov/program/stop-elder-fraud/providing-help-restoring-hope>

### U.S. Department of Justice

202-514-2000

800-877-8339 (TTY)

[elder.justice@usdoj.gov](mailto:elder.justice@usdoj.gov)

[www.justice.gov/elderjustice](http://www.justice.gov/elderjustice)

[www.justice.gov/elderjustice/roadmap](http://www.justice.gov/elderjustice/roadmap)

### National Adult Protective Services Association

202-370-6292

[www.napsa-now.org](http://www.napsa-now.org)

### National Domestic Violence Hotline

800-799-7233 (24/7)

800-787-3224 (TTY)

[www.thehotline.org/get-help](http://www.thehotline.org/get-help)

This content is provided by the NIH National Institute on Aging (NIA). NIA scientists and other experts review this content to ensure it is accurate and up to date.

Content reviewed: July 21, 2023

[Return to top](#)

## Newsletters

Sign up to receive updates and resources delivered to your inbox.

**Sign up**

[nia.nih.gov](http://nia.nih.gov)

*An official website of the [National Institutes of Health](#)*