
Elder Abuse and Neglect Information Sheet

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In every community across this country there are older adults who are being abused, neglected, or financially exploited. Yet in many instances these cases remain hidden, and what should have been the golden years turn into the nightmare years. In some instances the abuse continues because the older person is embarrassed, ashamed, or fearful of losing the help they need from family members or caregivers to remain in their home. In other cases family members or neighbors overlook signs of abuse, don't want to get involved, or are too trusting of caregivers who are abusing that trust. As the number of older adults in our population increases, the incidence of elder abuse will almost certainly increase unless we take action to address the problem.

What is elder abuse?

Abuse is defined as the harm or threatened harm to an adult's health or welfare caused by another. Abuse can take many forms including physical and emotional abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation. Neglect can be self neglect - resulting from the older adult's inability to respond to a harmful situation - or caregiver neglect - the failure of a person who assumes responsibility for a significant aspect of the adult's health or welfare to respond to a harmful situation or to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, or medical care. Financial exploitation involves the misuse of an adult's funds or property. Exploitation can include outright theft, misuse of a power of attorney or other breach of a fiduciary duty to manage funds belonging to the adult, or an intentional breach of a promise to repay money or provide promised services.

What can I do if I suspect that a family member, friend or neighbor is being abused or exploited?

You can begin by asking questions of the older person, a caregiver, family members or friends. You can stop by the older person's home for a brief visit to ask how they are doing. During the visit you can observe the home situation. If a family member or caregiver is trying isolate the older person from social contact this can be an important "red flag" for abuse or neglect.

Where should I report suspected elder abuse or neglect?

Contact the Statewide Centralized Intake Unit for Adult Protective Services, 855-444-3911, which is staffed 24 hours/day, 7 days/week. This unit will conduct the intake process and refer cases to the local APS unit in the county where the abuse is occurring. A report does not have to be based on eye witness accounts or incriminating statements or definite proof of abuse. If you have a reasonable suspicion you should make a report. After receiving the report APS will conduct an investigation. The identity of the person reporting the abuse is kept confidential.

In Genesee County you can also report suspected abuse or neglect to the Genesee County Sheriff's Elder Abuse unit, 810-257-3422. There are two detectives assigned to the unit, and other Sheriff's Department personnel assist as needed. The unit works closely with law enforcement personnel from other municipalities, Adult Protective Services, medical and social services providers, representatives from local financial institutions, the Genesee County Probate Court, and the Genesee County Prosecutor's Office.

