Six Types of Elder Abuse

Learn more about the six types of elder abuse: physical, emotional, neglect, sexual, abandonment, and financial abuse/exploitation. It is important to recognize the signs and symptoms of family guilt and caregiver stress. If a family member is acting abnormal and not within the bounds of caregiver stress or guilty conscience, you may be witnessing a case of elder abuse.

“According to three major studies, between 7 and 10% of Americans over age 60 have been victims of abuse in the span of a single year.”


“In New York State alone, it is estimated that for every one case of elder abuse, neglect, exploitation or self-neglect reported to authorities, about five more go unreported.”


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SOURCE: “Major Types of Elder Abuse”. National Center on Elder Abuse © 2010.
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1. PHYSICAL ABUSE
- The use of physical force that may result in bodily injury, physical pain or impairment.
- Such acts of violence as striking (with or without an object), hitting, beating, pushing, shoving, shaking, slapping, kicking, pinching and burning.
- Inappropriate use of drugs and physical restraints, force-feeding, and physical punishment of any kind also are examples of physical abuse too.

2. EMOTIONAL/PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE
“The infliction of anguish, pain, or distress through verbal or nonverbal acts. Emotional abuse includes, but is not limited, verbal assaults, insults, threats, intimidation, humiliation, and harassment. Treating an older person like an infant; isolating an elderly person from his/her family, friends, or regular activities; giving an older person the ‘silent treatment;’ and enforced social isolation are examples.”

Signs and Symptoms
- Being emotionally upset or agitated.
- Unusual behavior usually attributed to dementia (e.g., sucking, biting, rocking).
- An elder’s report of being verbally or emotionally mistreated.
- Being extremely withdrawn and non communicative or non responsive.

3. NEGLECT
“The refusal or failure to fulfill any part of a person’s obligations or duties to an elder. Neglect typically means the refusal or failure to provide an elderly person with such life necessities as food, water, clothing, shelter, and other essentials included in an implied or agreed upon responsibility to an elder.”

Signs and Symptoms
- Dehydration, malnutrition, untreated bed sores, and poor personal hygiene.
- Unattended or untreated health problems.
- Hazardous or unsafe living condition/ arrangements (e.g. improper wiring, no heat, or no running water).
- Unsanitary and unclean living conditions (e.g. dirt, fleas, lice on a person, soiled bedding, fecal/urine smell, inadequate clothing).
- An elder’s report of being mistreated.

4. SEXUAL ABUSE
“Non-consensual sexual contact of any kind with an elderly person. Sexual contact with any person incapable of giving consent is also considered sexual abuse. It includes, but is not limited to, unwanted touching, all types of sexual assault or battery, such as rape, sodomy.”

Signs and Symptoms
- Bruises around breasts or genital area.
- Unexplained venereal disease of genital infections.
- Unexplained vaginal or anal bleeding.
- Torn, stained, or bloody underclothing.
- An elder’s report of being sexually assaulted or raped.

5. ABANDONMENT
“The desertion of an elderly person of an individual who has assumed responsibility for providing care for an elder, or by a person with physical custody of an elder.”

Signs and Symptoms
- The desertion of an elder at a hospital, a nursing facility, or similar institution.
- The desertion of an elder at a shopping center or public location.
- An elder’s own report of being abandoned.

6. FINANCIAL ABUSE/EXPLOITATION
“The illegal or improper use of an elder’s funds, property or assets. Examples include, but are not limited to, cashing an elderly person’s checks without authorization or permission; forging an older’s person’s money or possessions; coercing or deceiving an older person into signing any document (e.g. contracts or wills); and the improper use of conservatorship, guardianship, or power of attorney.”

Signs and Symptoms
- Sudden changes in bank account or banking practice, including an unexplained withdrawal of large sums of money by a person accompanying the elder.
- The inclusion of additional names on an elder’s bank signature card.
- Unauthorized withdrawal of the elder’s funds using the elder’s ATM card.
- Abrupt changes in a will or other financial documents.
- Unexplained disappearance of funds or possessions.

REPORTING ELDER ABUSE
- Follow your facility’s protocol for reporting abuse.
- Report incidences to your state office of Elderly Protective Services.
- Information can be reported anonymously to the state, but talk with an administrator, social worker, or any other staff member you trust if you do not feel comfortable contacting the state directly.