

Recognizing the Signs of Elder Abuse

TARA SOLOMON-SMITH – FAMILY & COMMUNITY WELLNESS AGENT

June is Elder Abuse Awareness Month. About 1 out of every 10 older adults living at home faces some type of abuse each year, making awareness and prevention important.

Elder abuse is a serious problem that many people do not notice. It means someone intentionally hurts an older person or fails to take care of them when they should. This can happen at home, in the community, or in care facilities. The person causing harm may be a caregiver, family member, or someone the older adult trusts.

Types of Elder Abuse

Elder abuse can happen in different ways:

- Physical abuse – hurting someone by hitting, pushing, or holding them down
- Emotional abuse – yelling, threatening, or keeping someone away from others
- Financial abuse – taking or using someone's money or belongings without permission
- Neglect – not giving enough food, care, or help with basic needs
- Sexual abuse – any unwanted touching

Signs to Watch For

Physical:

- Bruises, cuts, or burns with no clear reason
- Weight loss or dehydration
- Dirty clothing or poor hygiene
- Medical needs not being taken care of
- Missing items like medicine, glasses, or walkers

Emotional and behavioral:

- Fear, worry, or anxiety
- Staying away from friends or activities
- Acting differently than usual
- Sleeping problems or mood changes

Financial signs:

- Bills not being paid
- Sudden changes in spending
- Fake signatures
- Changes to money papers without a clear reason

Signs of neglect:

- Unsafe or dirty living space
- Not enough food
- Lack of medical care

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What You Can Do

If you think an older adult is being abused:

- Talk to them privately if it is safe
- Write down what you notice
- Report it to Adult Protective Services
- Call 911 if it is an emergency

You can also call the Eldercare Locator at 1-800-677-1116 to find help in your area.

We All Can Help

Many cases of elder abuse are not reported because older adults may feel scared or are dependent on the person hurting them. By learning the signs and speaking up, we can help keep older adults safe and treat them with respect and care.

Information for this article came from the National Center of Elder Abuse. For more information, contact Tara Solomon-Smith, Family & Community Wellness Agent, at 620-244-3826 or tsolomon@ksu.edu.

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