

“CARING FOR YOU, CARING FOR OTHERS”

Elder Emotional Abuse

Abuse can happen to anyone, but the elderly are particularly vulnerable. This is especially true if they are sick or need medical care. Each year, hundreds of thousands of adults over the age of 60 are abused, neglected, or financially exploited. This is called elder abuse and it takes many forms.

Emotional or Psychological Abuse

Emotional or psychological abuse is believed to be the most common form of elder abuse. It is also the most difficult form of abuse to detect because it often lacks clear evidence. It involves threats, humiliation, fear, manipulation, or other cruel conduct that take advantage of elders' vulnerability in ways that control or humiliate. Abuse comes with verbal or nonverbal communication such as harassment, scolding, and insults. Sometimes, elders are threatened with physical punishment or withholding basic needs; for example: denying food or making an elder wait long periods for food, medication, heat, or basic care. Other examples include placing the individual's walker, cane, glasses, dentures, or other necessary items out of reach. Having a physical disability almost doubles a woman's risk of emotional abuse. But even grandfathers can be abused, especially if they care for grandchildren.

Often, an elder abuser is a highly stressed close relative who depends on the elder person financially, psychologically, or both. It is also known, that 95% of men who *physically* abuse their intimate partners also psychologically abuse them. Psychologically abusive men are more likely to use weapons against their partners, have prior criminal arrests, abuse substances, and have employment problems. Women who provide the majority of the household's income are more likely to be psychologically abused.

Emotional neglect is when an elder is deprived of healthy mental well-being. Long periods of solitude and failure to provide companionship contribute to neglect-even if the senior is provided essentials such as food, water, and shelter-but no opportunity for social interaction. Controlling the senior's freedom can lead to feelings of low self-esteem and emotional pain. Psychological abuse and neglect can make clinical depression and other

Signs of Possible Abuse

Elderly people age 80 and older suffer abuse at a rate two to three times greater than the population as a whole. The abused senior may show some of the following signs.

- * passivity, withdrawal, or increasing depression
- * evasiveness or reluctance to talk openly
- * avoidance of eye or verbal contact with the caregiver or family member
- * cowering in the presence of the abuser; hopelessness, anxiety, or feelings of powerlessness
- * confusion that is unrelated to any medical condition
- * change in sleeping or eating habits
- * contradictory statements
- * missing appointments
- * isolation from friends or other family

When assessing whether abuse has occurred, it is also helpful to observe the interaction with caregivers or significant others involved in the elder's immediate situation.

Some characteristics of those who commit the abuse:

- * history of substance abuse or abuse of others
- * exaggerated concern or lack of concern
- * blaming the elder for common acts, such as incontinence aggressive behaviors
- * treating the elder like a child or in a dehumanizing way
- * not allowing the elder to be interviewed alone
- * responding defensively when questioned or becoming hostile or evasive

Memory Care

People with dementia often have depression and anxiety. Your reaction depends on how you interpret the behavior. If you can be aware of what she needs and feels or what is upsetting her, you may have an easier time responding calmly.

Taking Care of Yourself— Do You Need A Break?

Caregiver stress can trigger elder abuse. Some sources of caregiver stress include depression, lack of support from other caregivers, and a feeling that caregiving is burdensome or without emotional rewards. Adult children who have no financial resources to provide care are especially vulnerable to stress. Caregivers who are solely responsible for a senior's care may become isolated from relatives and friends. This can be dangerous because it cuts them off from the support they need to cope with caregiving. Isolation also makes it harder for other people to intervene when a senior is being abused or neglected. If you are a caregiver and feel overwhelmed, seek therapy, help from other family members, or consider other care options for the elderly person. Many state and nonprofit agencies also offer respite services to provide family members with temporary relief from the stress of caring for a senior. Find a support group for caregivers of the elderly.

Life is hard.

Compared to what?



Resources to Call for Help

The local Adult Protective Services agency may be able to provide some community referrals. If the person lives in a nursing home or assisted living facility, contact the Long-Term Care Ombudsman.

Check the Eldercare Locator website for community services or call **1-800-677-1116**.
The National Domestic Violence Hotline operated 24 hours a day, 7 days a week:
1-800-799-SAFE (7233), or 1-800-727-3224



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Inspiration

*I've learned that people will forget what
you said, people will forget what you did,
but people will never forget how you
made them feel.*

~Angela Mayou