

Why Should I Care About Elder Abuse?

Elder abuse is an under recognized problem with devastating and even life threatening consequences.

Every day, headlines throughout the U.S. paint a grim picture of seniors who have been abused, neglected, and exploited, often by people they trust the most. Abusers may be spouses, family members, personal acquaintances, or professionals in positions of trust; or opportunistic strangers who prey on the vulnerable.

How big is the problem? No one really knows. Relatively few cases are identified, as elders often are reluctant to report the mistreatment. Experts estimate that only **one in five cases or fewer are reported**, which means that very few seniors who have been abused get the help they need. One thing is for certain: elder abuse can happen to *any* older individual – your neighbor, your loved one - it can even happen to *you*.

What is Elder Abuse?

According to Virginia statute, abuse of an incapacitated adult is committing knowing and willful conduct that causes physical injury or pain, or the use of physical restraint or confinement as punishment, for convenience, or as a substitute for treatment. Neglect is the knowing and willful failure by a responsible person to provide treatment, care, or services that results in injury or endangers the safety of an incapacitated adult. (Virginia Code Ann. § 18.2-369)

Who is at Risk?

Elder abuse can occur *anywhere* – in the home, in nursing homes, or other institutions. It affects seniors across all socio-economic groups, cultures, and races. Based on available information, women and “older” elders are more likely to be victimized. Dementia is a significant risk factor. Mental health and substance abuse issues - of both abusers and victims - are risk factors. Isolation can also contribute to risk.

What Should I Do if I Suspect Elder Abuse?

Report Your Concerns.

Remember:

Most cases of elder abuse go undetected. Don't assume that someone has already reported a suspicious situation.

To report suspected abuse, neglect or exploitation of adults age 60 and over, or incapacitated adults aged 18 and over, call your local department of social services or the Virginia Department of Social Services 24-hour, toll-free Adult Protective Services hotline at:

1-888-832-3858.

If you or someone you know is in a life threatening situation or immediate danger, contact 911 or the local police or sheriff.

Who Must Report?

Anyone who suspects abuse, neglect, or exploitation of an elder or incapacitated adult is urged to report these concerns. However, Virginia revised statute 63.2-1606 **requires** certain individuals to report suspected mistreatment, including: persons licensed, certified, or registered by health regulatory boards; mental health services providers; emergency medical services providers; guardians and conservators; persons employed by or contracted with a public or private agency or facility and working with adults in an administrative, supportive, or direct care capacity; persons providing full, intermittent, or occasional care to an adult for compensation, including but not limited to companion, chore, homemaker and personal care workers; and law-enforcement officers.

State Resources

Virginia Adult Protective Services
1-888-832-3858

Virginia Department for the Aging
1-800-552-3402

Virginia Long Term Care
Ombudsman
1-804-565-1600

Seniors: Virginia TRIAD Resources
www.vaag.com/CONSUMER/TRIAD/index.html

Remember: You do not need to prove that abuse is occurring; it is up to the professionals to investigate suspicions.

Warning Signs

- **Physical Abuse** - Slap marks, unexplained bruises, most pressure marks, and certain types of burns or blisters, such as cigarette burns
- **Neglect** - Pressure ulcers, filth, lack of medical care, malnutrition or dehydration
- **Emotional Abuse** - Withdrawal from normal activities, unexplained changes in alertness, or other unusual behavioral changes
- **Sexual Abuse** - Bruises around the breasts or genital area and unexplained sexually transmitted diseases
- **Financial Abuse/Exploitation** - Sudden change in finances and accounts, altered wills and trusts, unusual bank withdrawals, checks written as “loans” or “gifts,” and loss of property

What Can / Do to Prevent Elder Abuse?

- *Report suspected mistreatment* to your local adult protective services agency or law enforcement. Although a situation may have already been investigated, if you believe circumstances are getting worse, continue to speak out.
- *Keep in contact* – Talk with your older friends, neighbors, and relatives. Maintaining communication will help decrease isolation, a risk factor for mistreatment. It will also give them a chance to talk about any problems they may be experiencing.
- *Be aware of the possibility of abuse* – Look around and take note of what may be happening with your older neighbors and acquaintances. Do they seem lately to be withdrawn, nervous, fearful, sad, or anxious, especially around certain people, when they have not seemed so in the past?
- *Contact your local Area Agency on Aging* office to identify local programs and sources of support, such as *Meals on Wheels*. These programs help elders to maintain health, well-being, and independence – a good defense against abuse.
- *Volunteer* – There are many local opportunities to become involved in programs that provide assistance and support for seniors.
- *World Elder Abuse Awareness Day* - Elder abuse is a global issue. Contact your local aging services organizations to find out how your community will observe World Day. Help to raise awareness by talking about the issue.
- *Learn more about the issue* - Visit the *National Center on Elder Abuse* website at www.ncea.aoa.gov.

The Diocese of Virginia
The Office of the Canon to the Ordinary
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Richmond, Virginia 23220
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www.thediocese.net



This fact sheet was created by the National Center on Elder Abuse (NCEA). Portions were adapted from the NCEA publication: 15 Questions & Answers About Elder Abuse (July 2005), available on the NCEA website at: www.ncea.aoa.gov.

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The NCEA is a national resource center that provides technical support and information to professionals and advocates working on behalf of older individuals. It also provides information and referral to the public. The NCEA is not an investigation, nor a reporting, agency, and cannot intervene in cases of suspected elder mistreatment.

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**Together, we have the
power to prevent
elder abuse.**