

## What Can Family and Friends Do to Prevent/Stop Abuse?

Do you need help caring for an elder?

- Request help, from friends, relatives, or local respite care agencies, so you can take a break, if only for a couple of hours.
- Find an adult day care program.
- Stay healthy and get medical care for yourself when necessary.
- Adopt stress reduction practices.
- Seek counseling for depression, which can lead to elder abuse.
- Find a support group for caregivers of the elderly.
- If you're having problems with drug or alcohol abuse there is help available through local support groups and other community programs.

## What you can do as a concerned friend or family member?

Watch for warning signs that might indicate elder abuse:

- Take a look at the elder's medications. Does the amount in the vial jive with the date of the prescription?
- Ask the elder if you may scan bank accounts and credit card statements for any unauthorized transactions.
- Call and visit as often as you can. Offer to stay with the elder so the caregiver can have a break—on a regular basis, if possible.
- If you suspect abuse, report it.

## As an Older Adult, What Can You Do to Protect Yourself?

If you are unhappy with the care you are receiving, speak up. Tell someone you trust and ask that person to report the abuse, neglect, or substandard care to an elder abuse helpline or long-term care ombudsman, or make the call yourself.

- Keep in touch with family and friends and avoid becoming isolated.
- Don't give away money you need to live on.
- Seek medical help when you need it and don't be afraid to confide in your doctor if someone is harming you.
- Don't give away your social security number, credit card numbers or financial information to people who don't have a need to know.
- Enlist professional help to get your personal affairs in

order with the assistance of a trusted friend or relative if necessary.

## It's the Law

Under Maryland law, any health practitioner, police officer, or human service worker who has reason to believe that a vulnerable adult is in danger is required to report that fact to the local department of social services. Any concerned person may also make such a report.

Persons who report the need for Adult Protective Services are protected under the law. Section 14-309 of the Family Law Article, Annotated Code of Maryland, states "any person who in good faith makes or participates in making a report under this subtitle or participates in an investigation or a judicial proceeding resulting from a report under this subtitle is immune from any civil liability that would otherwise result."

**All suspected cases of Adult Abuse and Neglect should be reported to your local DSS Office or by calling 1-800-91-PREVENT or (1-800-332-6347).**

**Follow this link:**

<https://mydhrbenefits.dhr.state.md.us/dashboardClient/#/dssMap>  
**for a list of DSS offices.**



This brochure is sponsored by the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Office of Health Care Quality; the Maryland Department of Aging, the Maryland Department of Human Resources, Office of Adult Services, Adult Protective Services Program; the Maryland Department of Aging; the Maryland Chiefs of Police Association, Inc.; and the Maryland Sheriffs' Association.



**Maryland Department of Health  
and Mental Hygiene**

Healthy People Healthy Communities

# Preventing Elder Abuse



# Preventing Elder Abuse



## What is Abuse?

In Maryland, Abuse is defined by law –Section 14-101 of the Family Law Article, Annotated Code of Maryland as the sustaining of any physical injury by a vulnerable adult as a

result of cruel or inhumane treatment or as a result of a malicious act by any person. There are six types of Abuse:

**Physical Abuse** - Is the use of force causing harm or pain to an individual, which includes but not limited to) hitting, kicking, pinching, slapping, shoving, shaking, and burning. Other forms of physical abuse involve the inappropriate use of medication or physical restraints.

**Financial Abuse/Exploitation** - Involves wrongfully taking or using an older adult's funds or property through theft, scams, fraud, or predatory lending.

**Psychological Abuse** - Causing emotional pain through verbal assaults, threats, or harassment. Perpetrators intimidate, humiliate, or attempt to isolate their victims.

**Sexual Abuse** - Is non-consensual sexual contact of any kind including, contact with an individual unable to consent to such contact - for instance, if they suffer from dementia and are unable to understand.

**Neglect** - Is an individual failing to meet the needs of an older adult who is under their care. This includes not providing essential things a person needs, such as food, water, shelter, clothing, or personal hygiene.

**Self-Neglect** - Involves failure of a person to meet vital self care needs, putting them at risk of harm for their safety and/or health.

## Is Abuse a Problem in Maryland?

The Maryland Department of Aging, Long Term Care Ombudsman Program investigated 2,332 in FY2012, 136 of the investigated reports were alleged resident abuse cases.

The Office of Health Care Quality (OHCQ) receives allegations of abuse regarding residents/patients in all licensed and/or federally certified facilities. In 2012, OHCQ received 907 reports of alleged vulnerable adult abuse.

The Maryland Department of Human Resources, Office of Adult Services, Adult Protective Services Program received approximately 6,801 reports of abuse, neglect, self-neglect and exploitation of vulnerable adults aged 18 years of age and older in FY 2012.

The Governor's Office of Crime Control and Prevention (GOCCP) served 194 victims of domestic violence in FY 2012 of persons who were 60 years of age or older.

The Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence (MNADV) reported that in 2012, 15 (31%) of the 49 persons killed in domestic violence incidents were 51 years of age or older.

## Where does Abuse Take Place?

Elder abuse tends to take place where the senior lives; most often in the home where abusers are often adult children, other family members such as grandchildren, or spouses/partners of elders. Elder abuse can also occur in institutional settings, especially long-term care facilities.

## What are the Signs and Symptoms of Abuse?

At first, you might not recognize or take seriously signs of elder abuse. They may appear to be symptoms of dementia or signs of the elderly person's frailty — or caregivers may explain them to you that way. In fact, many of the signs and symptoms of elder abuse do overlap with symptoms of mental deterioration, but that doesn't mean you should dismiss them on the caregiver's say-so. Some of the signs and symptoms of Elder Abuse are:

- Unexplained signs of injury such as bruises, welts, or scars; Broken bones, sprains, or dislocations
- Report of drug overdose or apparent failure to take medication regularly (a prescription has more remaining than it should)
- Broken eyeglasses or frames
- Signs of being restrained, such as rope marks on wrists
- Caregiver's refusal to allow you to see the elder alone

- Threatening, belittling, or controlling caregiver behavior that you witness
- Behavior from the elder that mimics dementia, such as rocking, sucking, or mumbling to oneself
- Unexplained venereal disease or genital infections
- Unexplained vaginal or anal bleeding
- Torn, stained, or bloody underclothing
- Unusual weight loss, malnutrition, dehydration
- Untreated physical problems, such as bed sores
- Unsanitary living conditions: dirt, bugs, soiled bedding and clothes
- Being left dirty or un-bathed
- Unsuitable clothing or covering for the weather
- Unsafe living conditions (no heat or running water; faulty electrical wiring, other fire hazards)
- Desertion of the elder at a public place
- Significant withdrawals from the elder's accounts
- Sudden changes in the elder's financial condition
- Items or cash missing from the senior's household
- Suspicious changes in wills, power of attorney, titles, and policies
- Addition of names to the senior's signature card
- Unpaid bills or lack of medical care, although the elder has enough money to pay for them
- Financial activity the senior couldn't have done, such as an ATM withdrawal when the account holder is bedridden
- Unnecessary services, goods, or subscriptions
- Duplicate billings for the same medical service or device
- Evidence of inadequate care when bills are paid in full
- Problems with the care facility: poorly trained, poorly paid, or insufficient staff; crowding; inadequate responses to questions about care