

Red Flags of Elder Abuse

Warning signs of physical abuse

- Bruises, black eyes, welts, lacerations, or rope marks
- Bone fractures, broken bones, or skull fractures
- Open wounds, cuts, punctures, untreated injuries in various stages of healing
- Sprains, dislocations, or internal injuries/bleeding
- Broken eyeglasses/frames, physical signs of being subjected to punishment, or signs of being restrained
- Laboratory findings of medication overdose or under-utilization of prescribed drugs
- An older adult's sudden change in behavior
- The caregiver's refusal to allow visitors to see or speak to an older adult alone
- An older adult's report of being hit, slapped, kicked, or mistreated

Warning signs of emotional/psychological abuse

- Being emotionally upset or agitated
- Being extremely withdrawn, non-communicative, or non-responsive
- Unusual behavior, such as sucking, biting, rocking
- Witnessing a caregiver controlling or isolating an older adult
- Exhibiting a change in sleeping patterns or eating habits
- Personality changes, such as apologizing excessively
- Depression or anxiety
- An older adult's report of being verbally or emotionally mistreated

Warning signs of sexual abuse

- Bruises around the breasts or genital area
- Unexplained venereal disease or genital infections
- Unexplained vaginal or anal bleeding
- Changes in an older adult's demeanor, such as showing fear or becoming withdrawn when a specific person is around
- Evidence of pornographic material being shown to an older adult with diminished capacity
- Blood found on sheets, linens or an older adult's clothing
- An older adult's report of being sexually assaulted or raped

Warning signs of financial exploitation

- Sudden changes in bank accounts or banking practices, including an unexplained withdrawal of large sums of money by a person accompanying the older adult
- The inclusion of additional names on an older adult's bank signature card
- Unauthorized withdrawal of the older adult's funds using their ATM card
- Abrupt changes in a will or other financial documents
- Unexplained disappearance of funds or valuable possessions
- Provision of substandard care or bills left unpaid despite the availability of adequate financial resources
- Discovery of a forged signature for financial transactions or for the titles of the older adult's possessions
- Sudden appearance of previously uninvolved relatives claiming their rights to an older adult's property or possessions
- Unexplained sudden transfer of assets to a family member or someone outside the family
- The provision of services that are not necessary
- An older adult's report of financial exploitation
- Unexplained credit card charges

Warning signs of neglect and abandonment

- Dehydration, malnutrition, untreated bed sores, and poor personal hygiene
- Unattended or untreated health problems
- Hazardous or unsafe living conditions/arrangements (e.g., improper wiring, no heat, or no running water)
- Unsanitary and unclean living condition (e.g., dirt, fleas, lice on person, soiled bedding, fecal/urine smell, inadequate clothing)
- The desertion of an older adult at a hospital, a nursing facility, or other similar institution, or a shopping center or other public location
- An older adult's report of being neglected or abandoned
- Lack of food in the refrigerator or cupboards

Source: U.S. Department of Justice, Elder Justice Initiative, November 7, 2023