

# Washtenaw County Elder Justice Coalition

*Because everyone needs a voice*

**What is Elder Abuse?** The mistreatment or neglect of an elderly person 65 and older or dependent adults 18-64 years of age who are physically, developmentally or emotionally disabled. Elder abuse includes neglect by caregivers, self-neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional/psychological or verbal abuse and financial exploitation. Elder abuse crosses all socio-economic, cultural and geographic boundaries and can occur anywhere by anyone.



**Financial or material exploitation** includes the illegal or improper use of an elder's funds, property or assets; improper use of conservatorship, guardianship or power of attorney; cashing checks without authorization or permission; forging a signature; misusing or stealing money or possessions; and coercing or deceiving an older person into signing any document.

#### Signs of financial or material exploitation:

- Unusual banking activity (e.g. large withdrawals during a brief period of time, switching of accounts from one bank to another, ATM activity by a homebound elder, sudden transfer of assets to a family member or someone outside the family)
- Bank statements (credit card statements, etc.) no longer come to the older adult
- Documents are being drawn up for the elder to sign but the elder can not explain or understand the purpose of the papers
- Signatures on checks and other documents do not match the signature of the older person
- Abrupt changes in a will, financial or legal documents
- Living situation is not commensurate with the size of the elder's estate (e.g. lack of new clothing, amenities, unpaid bills)
- Caregiver only expresses concern regarding the financial status of the older person rather than the physical and/or mental health status of the elder
- Personal belongings are missing
- Recent acquaintances, housekeepers, "care" providers, etc. declare undying affection for the older person and isolate the elder from long-term friends or family
- Recent acquaintances (e.g. housekeeper, caregiver) make promises of lifelong care in exchange for deeding all property and/or assigning all assets over to the acquaintance
- Sudden appearance of previously uninvolved relatives claiming rights to an elder's affairs and possessions

**Neglect** includes the refusal or failure to provide an elder with life necessities, personal safety and other essentials included in an implied or agreed-upon responsibility to an elder.

It may also include failure of a person who has fiduciary responsibilities to provide or pay for care, or the failure of a service provider to provide necessary care.

Self-neglect occurs when an elder, who understands the consequences of their decisions, makes a conscious and voluntary decision to ignore their basic needs or to care for themselves.

#### Signs of neglect

- Poor personal hygiene
- Unattended or untreated health problems
- Hazardous or unsafe living condition/arrangements (e.g. improper wiring, no heat, no running water)
- Unsanitary and unclean living conditions (e.g. dirt, fleas, lice, soiled bedding, fecal/urine smell, inadequate clothing)
- Evidence that personal care is lacking or neglected (e.g. maggots in open wounds)
- Signs of malnourishment (sunken eyes, loss of weight)
- Dehydration - extreme thirst
- Pressure sores

**Emotional or psychological abuse** is the infliction of anguish, pain or distress through verbal or nonverbal acts. It includes:

- Verbal assaults, insults, threats, intimidation, humiliation and harassment
- Treating an older person like an infant
- Isolating an elderly person from his/her family, friends or regular activities
- Giving an older person the “silent treatment” and enforced social isolation



#### Signs of emotional/psychological abuse

- Being emotionally upset or agitated
- Being extremely withdrawn and non communicative or non responsive
- Unusual behavior usually attributed to dementia (e.g. sucking, biting, rocking)
- Ambivalence, deference, passivity, shame
- Anxiety (mild to severe), depression, hopelessness, thoughts of suicide
- Confusion, disorientation
- Trembling, clinging, cowering, lack of eye contact, agitation, evasiveness

**Sexual abuse** consists of any sexual activity for which the older person does not consent or is incapable of giving consent. Activity includes unwanted touching, sexual assault, coerced nudity, exhibitionism, fondling and oral, anal or vaginal intercourse.

#### Signs of Sexual Abuse

- Unexplained venereal disease or genital infections, unusual discharge or smell, unexplained vaginal or anal bleeding
- Torn, stained or bloody underclothing
- Trauma to the genital area, bruises around the breasts



**To report elder abuse** or financial exploitation in Michigan, you can call anonymously. Be ready to give the elder's name, address, contact information, and details about your concerns. If you suspect elder abuse or financial exploitation call the Michigan Adult Protective Services 24-hour hotline at 1-800-996-6228 or Your local police department.



If you suspect elder abuse or financial exploitation in a nursing home or long term healthcare facility call Michigan Bureau of Health Systems at 1-800-882-6006 or the Michigan Office of the State Long Term Care Ombudsman at 1-866-485-9393

**Physical Abuse** is the use of physical force that may result in bodily injury, physical pain or impairment and includes the following actions:

- Pushing, shoving, shaking, slapping, pinching, kicking or hitting (with or without an object)
- Causing unnecessary pain
- Intentional misuse of medication
- Unauthorized restraint
- Causing injury such as sprains, fractures, detached retina, dislocation



#### Signs of physical abuse

- Unexplained signs of injury such as bruises, welts or scars (especially if they appear symmetrically)
- Scratches, cuts, burns, punctures, choke marks
- Broken bones, sprains or dislocations
- Broken eye glasses
- Signs of being restrained (e.g. rope marks on wrists)
- Caregiver doesn't allow others to see the elder alone
- Inconsistent explanations of the injuries or repeated “unexplained” injuries
- Report of drug overdose or apparent failure to take medication regularly (a prescription has more remaining than it should)

**Who is at risk?** Several personal characteristics of elders, while they don't excuse the abuse, influence an elder's increased risk for abuse:

- The intensity of an elderly person's illness or dementia
- Social isolation (e.g. the elder and caregiver are alone together almost all the time)
- The elder's role, at an earlier time, as an abusive parent or spouse
- A history of domestic violence in the elder's home
- The elder's own tendency toward verbal/physical aggression

#### **Washtenaw County Elder Justice Coalition**



Mission: To acknowledge and prevent elder abuse in Washtenaw County through awareness, education, advocacy and enhanced partnerships. Vision: Older adults in Washtenaw County are safe and free from abuse, neglect and exploitation. Anyone interested in promoting our mission and vision is welcome to join the Coalition.

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