

Elder Abuse: Red Flags and Warning Signs

You may be concerned that something is wrong but not sure if someone you know is being abused, neglected, or exploited. Below is a list of some signs or red flags. Most or all of the red flags need NOT be present for abuse to be occurring. If you see one or two of these indicators, please follow up with questions or contact a domestic violence program or adult protective services.

Someone Who Might Be a Victim of Elder Abuse:

- Has repeated “accidental” injuries.
- Has physical injuries, such as bruises, broken bones, pressure injuries, burns.
- Is unable to follow through on treatment plans or medical care.
- Says she is “walking on eggshells.”
- Characterizes a loved one as “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.”
- Appears to be isolated or is unable to meet with you alone or is no longer available to talk to you or meet with you for no apparent reason.
- Says or hints at being afraid or harmed.
- Makes veiled disclosures, such as “my son has a temper,” or “I have to ask my wife’s permission for everything.”
- Suddenly has poor personal hygiene or is not meeting her personal needs, including pressure ulcers.
- Experiences sleep disturbances.
- Considers or attempts suicide.
- Is living in unsafe, unsanitary, or hazardous living conditions, including homelessness.
- Misses appointments, meetings, services, or community events unexpectedly.
- Have sudden or unexplained changes in lifestyle, choices, or behavior.

- Adds new names to his bank accounts, opens new lines of credit, or has unusual or sudden changes in financial transactions or financial institutions.

Someone Who Might Be an Abuser:

- Is verbally abusive to the older adult while charming and friendly to others.
- Says things like “she’s difficult,” “he’s just stubborn,” “she’s so stupid,” or “she’s clumsy.”
- Makes excuses or stops you from seeing your loved one and/or does not let you be alone with your loved one.
- Attempts to convince others that the older person is incompetent or crazy.
- Is overly attentive to the older person, which may mask controlling behaviors.
- Controls the older person’s activities and outside contacts.
- Talks about the older person as if she is not there or not a person
- Threatens suicide or homicide or both.
- Stalks or subjects the older person to unwanted pursuit, following, or harassment that would cause a reasonable person to feel fear or emotional distress and serves no legitimate purpose.
- Sabotages the older person’s efforts to attend services, meetings, events, or appointments by refusing to provide transportation or some other excuse.
- Hit, push, pinch, strangle, or slap you?
- Threatened to kill you?
- Has family or friends expressed their concern about your relationship?
- Are your children, friends, or other family members afraid to visit you?
- Are you concerned that someone may be harming or controlling you but don’t know where to get help?