

# Elder Abuse within Tribal Communities

## Understanding Abuse

**Elders are highly esteemed in our Tribal communities. They are the keepers of our cultural knowledge and the memories of our Tribe.**

Elders kept Tribal languages and traditions alive. They carry these traditions for us and pass down our oral histories. Elders can often be referred to as libraries because of the vast Tribal knowledge they hold.



“Elders in our community deserve to live a safe and peaceful life they choose.”

Both men and women can be at risk of Elder abuse. Research indicates that 2/3 of the victims are female. (Lachs & Berman, 2011) People at any age can become victims of domestic or sexual violence.

Many older adults worry about the loss of independence or being sent to live outside of their Tribal community. Elders may believe if they tell someone about the abuse they will be institutionalized, abandoned, or killed.

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| ● | <b>Every person is entitled to live their life free of harm.</b>   |
| ● | <b>When an Elder is deprived of the basic necessities of life, the community must collectively respond to protect him/her.</b>               |
| ● | <b>Elders have the right to make decisions that do not conform with others' expectations or beliefs, as long as they do not harm others.</b> |

**Understanding what Elder abuse looks like is crucial because it can take many forms and mean different things to different people.**

### **Physical Abuse**

Physical force that causes injury, pain, or impairment such as hitting, pushing, slapping, pinching, throwing objects, pulling hair, strangulation, and burning. It can be actions such as using restraints or force-feeding the Elder.

### **Sexual Abuse**

Sexual contact when consent is not given. This means the person did not indicate it was okay, or they could not indicate it was okay. It can be unwanted touching, forced sex acts, forced nudity, or taking sexual pictures without consent.

### **Social Abuse**

Devaluing an individual or isolating them from family, friends, or regular activities or taking advantage of someone's social status. It can be silent treatment, failing to visit, or preventing them from using the phone, email, or computer.



### **Spiritual or Cultural Abuse**

When a person devalues or harms an Elder's spiritual beliefs or cultural practices. It can be treating sacred objects with disrespect, stealing ceremonial items, preventing Elders from eating traditional foods or using traditional medicines, or interfering with the Elder from going to cultural activities, or ceremonies.

### **Emotional Abuse**

Cause pain, anguish, or distress through verbal and non-verbal acts. This can be name-calling, yelling, put-downs, or making someone feel fearful or not good about themselves.

### **Neglect**

Refusal or failing to fulfill part of a person's obligation or duties such as failing to pay necessary bills, abandonment, improper use of medicines, or disregarding medical problems or care. Also, not providing enough food, clothing, shelter, or necessities like wood, coal, and water.

**Citation:** Lachs, M. S., & Berman, J. (2011). Under the radar: New York State elder abuse prevalence study. Prepared by Lifespan of Greater Rochester, Inc., Weill Cornell Medical Center of Cornell University, and New York City Department for the Aging.

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