

Prevent Abuse. Understand the Risk Factors.

Becoming familiar with the risk factors associated with elder abuse can help prevent it.

DEPENDENCY

A senior dependent on others for care: Seniors may be reluctant to speak up about any abuse because they feel dependent on their abuser for care, and do not feel safe reporting it.

A caregiver dependent on a senior for support: This can particularly be an issue in the case of adult children who may be dependent on their elderly parent for financial assistance, housing or other forms of support, perhaps due to personal issues including mental illness, alcohol or drug abuse.

(According to a 1998 National Elder Abuse Incidence study funded by the Administration on Aging, in 90 percent of known cases of elder abuse and neglect, the perpetrators were family members, and of those, about 75 percent were adult children or spouses. The risk of elder abuse seems to be particularly high when these adult children live with the elder.)

DECREASED PHYSICAL HEALTH AND MOBILITY

Dementia, Alzheimer's and/or increased dependency for assistance with the activities of daily living may raise an elder's risk of being abused. The elder may not be capable of explaining the abuse or verbalizing it.

CAREGIVER STRESS

Few family members are fully prepared for the ongoing, long-term care requirements for an aging loved one. Caregiving demands and other pressures from job or other family demands can lead to caregiver burnout, which can result in abuse, although unintentional.



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CAREGIVER LACK OF TIME

Many family caregivers are being pulled in several directions for their time and attention. Careers, family and household responsibilities can all add up to an overworked, overbooked person. With only so much time in the day, unintentional neglect of the senior in the household may occur.

CYCLE OF VIOLENCE

In many cases the perpetrators of elder abuse were once abused themselves, creating a cycle of abuse. A wife who was abused by her husband may now be abusing him in his frail state as a form of retribution. The same holds true for children who were mistreated by parents.

SOCIAL ISOLATION

Isolation is often the result of deaths of contemporaries, spouses, siblings and friends. Abusers often try to keep an elder isolated by:

- Refusing to apply for economic aid or services.
- Resisting outside help.
- Changing social and healthcare providers frequently so that the elder's situation is hard to assess.
- Keeping family and friends from having contact with the elder.

Isolation can hide the effects of physical abuse, neglect or exploitation and can also be used as a form of emotional abuse.

SUBSTANCE ABUSE

If the elder abuses alcohol or drugs, the resulting mental confusion could make him or her more vulnerable to abuse. Additionally, caregivers who are substance abusers may exploit the elder to finance their addictions and may also physically or emotionally abuse the elder. An individual with emotional or health problems to deal with could slip over the edge of reason when also having to care for a frail senior.

You can prevent abuse by providing the family caregiver with the break he or she needs while ensuring loved ones still receive the attention they deserve. Report abuse to your local authorities, if suspected.

Continuum has trained, professional, dependable caregivers who can provide that much needed respite to an overtaxed caregiver. Call **Continuum** today for resources to report, educate and help.