



A FAMILY  
RESOURCE

# Recognizing the Major Types of Elder Abuse

*Understanding the types of elder abuse is essential in identifying, preventing, and addressing the issue.*



## INTRODUCTION

*"Elder abuse is any intentional or negligent act by a caregiver or a trusted person that causes or creates a serious risk of harm to an older adult."*

*Understanding the types of elder abuse—physical, emotional, neglect, sexual, abandonment, and financial abuse/exploitation—is crucial for protecting the well-being of our loved ones.*

### **Why it's important to know the types and signs of elder abuse.**

Although family guilt and caregiver stress are common, when does a family member's behavior go beyond these bounds and become a concern? By being informed and vigilant, we can better identify and address these harmful situations.

**Physical Abuse:** includes intentional or reckless physical harm or coercion that may result in bodily injury, physical pain, or impairment. This includes hitting, beating, pushing, shaking, slapping, kicking, pinching, and burning. This also includes inappropriate use of drugs, restraints, and force feeding.

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### Signs and Symptoms

- Unexplained bruises, fractures, injuries, rope marks on wrists and ankles, especially if they occur repeatedly or are inconsistent with the explanation provided
- Fear or anxiety around certain caregivers or family members
- Reluctance to talk openly about injuries or reluctance to be examined
- Noticeable changes in behavior, such as withdrawal from usual activities or social interactions
- Avoidance of physical contact or flinching at sudden movements

### Emotional/Psychological Abuse:

encompasses verbal and nonverbal acts that cause distress, such as verbal assaults, insults, threats, intimidation, humiliation, harassment, and isolation from loved ones or regular activities.

### Signs and Symptoms

- Being emotionally upset or agitated
- Unusual behavior (e.g., sucking, biting, rocking)
- Being extremely withdrawn and non communicative or non responsive

**Sexual Abuse:** non-consensual sexual contact of any kind with an older adult or sexual interaction with elders who lack capacity to give consent. This includes but not limited to unwanted touching, sexual assault or battery, and sexual harassment.

### Signs and Symptoms

- Bruises around breasts or genital area.
- Unexplained venereal disease or genital infections.
- Unexplained vaginal or anal bleeding.
- Torn, stained, or bloody undergarments

**Neglect:** of an elder refers to failing or refusing to fulfill obligations or duties, including providing essential needs like food, water, clothing, and shelter.

### Signs and Symptoms

- Dehydration, malnutrition, untreated bed sores, and poor personal hygiene
- Unattended or untreated health problems
- Hazardous or unsafe living condition/arrangements
- Unsanitary and unclean living conditions

**Financial Abuse:** is the illegal or improper use of an elder's funds or assets, including unauthorized check cashing, forgery, coercion, or misuse of legal authority like conservatorship or power of attorney.

### Signs and Symptoms

- Sudden changes in bank account or banking practice, including unexplained withdrawals of money
- Additional names on an elder's bank signature card

- Unauthorized withdrawal of funds using the elder's ATM card or purchases on a credit card
- Abrupt changes in a will or other financial documents

**Abandonment:** is the desertion of an elder by a caregiver or person with assumed responsibility or with physical custody.

*\*A few state statutes classify abandonment as a separate and unique form of elder abuse. Definitions vary by state.*

### Signs and Symptoms

- The desertion of an elder at a hospital, nursing facility, or any public location

### Reporting Elder Abuse

Please note that these signs don't always guarantee elder abuse but may warrant further investigation or intervention.

If you suspect abuse, report it to authorities like adult protective services or law enforcement.

Long-term care facility employees are considered "Mandated Reporters" and have a legal and moral obligation to report any signs of abuse to their supervisors.

**You can learn more about elder abuse at the National Center on Elder Abuse: [www.ncea.acl.gov](http://www.ncea.acl.gov).**

SOURCE: "Major Types of Elder Abuse."  
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**Additional resources can be found on our website, [www.avilainstitute.org/family-resources](http://www.avilainstitute.org/family-resources).**

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