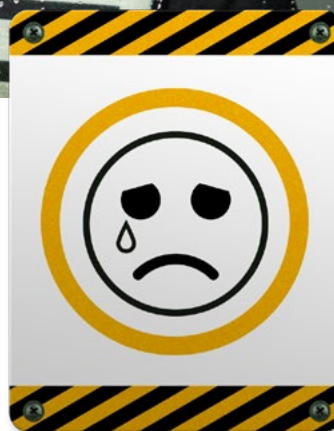


Elder Abuse

Keeping Yourself and Your Loved Ones Safe



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Abuse can happen to anyone, no matter one’s age, sex, race, or ethnicity. In this article we address elder abuse. The abuse of older individuals, also known as elder abuse, is an intentional act (or failure to act), by a person in a position of trust/power (family member, friend, caregivers, health care provider, etc) that causes harm to an adult 60 years and older. A 2022 World Health Organization report states that globally 1 in 6 people aged 60 and older experience some form of abuse in the community every year: with rates in institutions (nursing homes, senior living, and long-term care facilities) even higher.

Abuse can happen anywhere, including in the older person’s home, a family member’s home, an assisted living or long-term care facility.

There are six common types of elder abuse:

- » **Physical abuse** happens when someone causes bodily harm; for example, by hitting, pushing, slapping, kicking, or restraining an older adult against their will, such as by locking them in a room or tying them to furniture. Physical abuse can also include the misuse of an older person’s medications/prescriptions such as withholding medication, over-medicating, or not complying with prescription refills.
- » **Emotional/Psychological abuse** can include a person saying hurtful words, yelling, threatening, humiliating, or repeatedly ignoring the older adult. Isolating the person from close friends, relatives, or activities is another form of emotional abuse.
- » **Neglect** occurs when a person does not try to respond to the older adult’s needs. Neglect may include ignoring physical, emotional, and social needs, or withholding/delaying food, medications, or access to health care.
- » **Abandonment** is leaving an older adult who needs help alone without planning for their care. ****Both neglect and abandonment can be intentional or unintentional, based on factors such as ignorance or denial that a senior needs as much care as he or she does.**
- » **Sexual abuse** involves any sexual contact without consent. This can include forcing an older adult to watch or be part of sexual acts, or undress without consent.
- » **Financial abuse** happens when money or belongings are misused or stolen from an older adult. It can include forging checks, taking someone else’s retirement or seniors’ benefits, withholding access to money or financial information, or using a person’s credit cards and bank accounts without their permission. It also includes changing names on a will, bank account, life insurance policy, or title to a house without permission.

If an older person is isolated or unable to advocate for themselves, it may be difficult or impossible for them to seek out help. Those in regular contact with an older person are often more aware of the individuals’ “normal” wellbeing and routines and are better equipped to identify changes that might suggest abuse.

There are many signs that may indicate elder abuse, watch for a pattern that might suggest a problem and seek help if you are concerned. Signs of abuse can include (but are not limited to):

- » Physical injuries/changes, such as unexplained bruises, burns, cuts, scrapes, scars, dislocations, broken bones, or weight loss. Unexplained anal/vaginal bleeding, venereal diseases, or vaginal infections.
- » Unexplained or uncharacteristic changes in behavior such as becoming withdrawn, unreasonably fearful/suspicious, agitated, or violent.
- » Display signs of trauma such as rocking back and forth, seems fearful around certain people.
- » Lack personal health care items such as glasses, a walker, dentures, or hearing aids.
- » Personal hygiene issues such as being left dirty/unbathed, lack of clean/appropriate clothes (ie: a sweater if it is cold), or poor dental hygiene.
- » Untreated bedsores.
- » Have hazardous, unsafe, or unclean living conditions.
- » Signs of insufficient care or unpaid bills despite having adequate financial resources.
- » Large withdrawals from bank accounts, suspicious changes to wills, power of attorney, etc, or other unusual activity.

If you feel YOU are being abused, seek help. If you feel you cannot leave safely confide in someone you trust – a friend, family member, Parkinson Association Client Services’ Coordinator, healthcare professional, church member, etc. If you are in immediate danger, call 9-1-1.

If you suspect a loved one/older person is being abused there are a variety of ways to get help and support.

First, if safe and possible document what is happening to your loved one (notes, photos, etc.), if the danger is immediate call 9-1-1. Second, speak to someone about your concerns. Parkinson Association of Alberta Client Services Coordinators can help as can the 24-hr Family Violence Info Line (310-1818). Alternatively, many cities and communities in Alberta have Elder/Senior Abuse helplines and resources – find the one nearest you here <https://www.albertaelderabuse.ca/getting-help>.

If you suspect abuse is happening to an adult receiving care or support services from publicly funded service providers such as hospitals, seniors’ lodges, nursing homes, mental health facilities, shelters, group homes, addictions treatment centres and other supportive living settings call the **Protection for Persons in Care Reporting Line at 1-888-357-9339**.

Elder abuse is a serious issue, and one we often don’t talk about openly. By talking about it, recognizing the signs, and reaching out for help, together we can keep all older people safe.

