

# *Elder Abuse in Oregon: Building Awareness and Encouraging Action*

## **Participants' Guide**

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### **What is Elder Abuse?**

Elder abuse is any form of mistreatment that results in harm or loss to an older person. It is generally divided into the following categories:

**Physical abuse** is physical force that results in bodily injury, pain, or impairment. It includes assault, battery, and inappropriate restraint.

**Sexual abuse** is non-consensual sexual contact of any kind with an older person.

**Domestic violence** is an escalating pattern of violence by an intimate partner where the violence is used to exercise power and control.

**Psychological or emotional abuse** is the willful infliction of mental or emotional anguish by threat, humiliation, or other verbal or nonverbal conduct.

**Financial abuse or exploitation** is the illegal or improper use of an older person's funds, property, or resources.

**Neglect** is the failure of a caregiver to fulfill his or her caregiving responsibilities.

**Self-neglect** is failure to provide for one's own essential needs.

### **Possible Indicators of Abuse, Neglect, or Exploitation**

The following descriptions are not necessarily proof of abuse, neglect, or exploitation. But they may be clues that a problem exists, and that a report needs to be made to law enforcement or Adult Protective Services.

#### **Physical Signs**

- Injury that has not been cared for properly
- Injury that is inconsistent with explanation for its cause
- Pain from touching
- Cuts, puncture wounds, burns, bruises, welts
- Dehydration or malnutrition not due to disease or illness
- Poor coloration

- Sunken eyes or cheeks
- Inappropriate administration of medication
- Soiled clothing or bed
- Frequent use of hospital or health care/doctor-shopping
- Lack of necessities such as food, water, or utilities
- Absence of personal items, pleasant living environment
- Forced isolation

### **Behavioral Signs**

- Fear, anxiety, agitation, anger
- Isolation, withdrawal, depression
- Non-responsiveness, resignation, ambivalence
- Contradictory statements, implausible stories
- Hesitation to talk openly
- Confusion or disorientation

### **Signs by Caregiver**

- Prevents elder from speaking to or seeing visitors
- Anger, indifference, aggressive behavior toward elder
- History of substance abuse, mental illness, criminal behavior, or family violence
- Lack of affection toward elder
- Flirtation or coyness as possible indicator of inappropriate sexual relationships
- Conflicting accounts of incidents
- Withholds affection
- Talks of elder as a burden

### **Signs of Financial Exploitation**

- Frequent expensive gifts from elder to caregiver
- Elder's personal belongings, papers, credit cards missing
- Numerous unpaid bills
- A recent will when elder seems incapable of writing will
- Caregiver's name added to bank account
- Elder unaware of monthly income
- Elder signs on loan
- Frequent checks made out to "cash"
- Unusual activity in bank account

- Irregularities on tax return
- Elder unaware of reason for appointment with banker or attorney
- Caregiver's refusal to spend money on elder
- Signatures on checks or legal documents that do not resemble elder's signature

**Keeping yourself safe:**

- Stay as healthy and mobile as possible. Eat healthy foods, exercise, do what you can to avoid chronic debilitating conditions.
- Do activities that help keep your mind sharp. Working puzzles, playing word games, taking classes, and reading all can be helpful.
- Develop and maintain strong ties to family members and friends, especially younger ones. Increase your network of friends.
- Avoid isolating yourself at home. Get out and socialize with others, even if you have to rely on others for rides. Take advantage of the many programs available through local senior centers and community agencies. Or, ask friends to visit you at home.
- Stay on top of your finances and protect your money. Your financial institution may be able to help you protect your money by arranging your accounts to control access to your funds. Keep blank checks in a safe place, use direct deposit for all regular checks such as Social Security, and never lend your ID, credit card, ATM card or checks to anyone.
- Review your will periodically. Get to know your banker and attorney. Don't sign a document unless someone you trust has reviewed it.
- Anticipate potential incapacitation and make plans so that your wishes are followed. Set up your powers of attorney for finances and health care now, before they are needed.
- Check references for anyone who wants to work for you.
- If you are becoming fearful of your care providers, whether they are family members or hired assistants, or if you think you are being coerced, exploited, intimidated, threatened, neglected, or abused in any way, contact your local agency that provides Adult Protective Services or call this toll free number in Oregon: **1-800-232-3020**. They will refer you to the agency in your area that handles local services. If it is an emergency situation, call 911.

**My local Adult Protective Services agency is \_\_\_\_\_ and their phone number is \_\_\_\_\_ .**

**Keeping others safe:** What can one person do? A lot! Here are some ideas:

- Visit and make phone calls to your older friends who no longer attend your study group meetings or other social functions.
- Volunteer as an ombudsman at a local long-term facility. Call 1-800-522-2602 or e-mail [LTCO.contact@state.or.us](mailto:LTCO.contact@state.or.us) for more information.
- If you suspect that someone is being abused or exploited, report it! It is always better to have it investigated than to ignore your suspicions.
- Find your local Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) or Area Agency on Aging office by using this website: <http://egov.oregon.gov/DHS/spwpa/offices.shtml>. Call them to see if there is a Family Caregiver Support Program or Lifespan Respite Care Program in your area. These programs can provide caregiver trainings, support, and access to respite services so the family member who is providing care to an elder can take a break. Share what you learn with your contacts in the community.
- Adopt a resident in a long-term care facility. Ask for help from the administrator or staff to find a resident who has few or no visitors. You can visit, send cards, bring flowers, sit and hold a hand, even if there is little response.
- Learn all you can about elder issues in your area. If you see a need, alert your local elected officials.
- Write letters for residents whose families live far away. This point of contact could be a real service to a concerned son or daughter in another state.
- Help the activities director at a local facility. Teach a craft, play the piano for a sing-along, or bring some pets, babies, or children along to brighten someone's day. Or just pass around some hugs.
- Become an advocate for change. For Oregon, read over the December 2004 report of the Oregon Elder Abuse Task Force at [http://governor.oregon.gov/Gov/pdf/Elder\\_Abuse\\_Report.pdf](http://governor.oregon.gov/Gov/pdf/Elder_Abuse_Report.pdf) and find an area where you can be an advocate for improved services to reduce crime against elders. Nationally, you can read the Call to Action to Protect America's Most Vulnerable Elders at <http://www.elderabusecenter.org/pdf/agenda/agenda2002.pdf>

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