

# **Vulnerable Adult Abuse Prevention**

***If at any time you suspect abuse or neglect of any form, call 1 866 END-HARM***

## **Types and Signs of Abuse**

It has been estimated that roughly two-thirds of those harming a vulnerable adult are family members, most often the victim's adult child or spouse. Research has shown that in most instances the abuser is financially dependent on the vulnerable adult's resources and have problems related to alcohol and drugs.

### ***So who is a "vulnerable adult"?***

- a person 60 years of age or older who lacks the functional, physical, or mental ability to care for him or herself;
- an adult with a developmental disability per 71A.10.020;
- an adult with a legal guardian per 11.88 RCW;
- an adult living in a long-term care facility (an adult family home, boarding home or nursing home);
- an adult living in their own or family's home receiving services from an agency or contracted individual provider; or
- an adult self-directing their care per law (74.39.050 RCW)

**The word abuse covers many different ways someone may harm a vulnerable adult. It's important to stay alert to the different Types of Abuse**

**Physical abuse** is intentional bodily injury. Some examples include slapping, pinching, choking, kicking, shoving, or inappropriately using drugs or physical restraints.

### ***What are the signs of physical abuse?***

- bruises, black eyes, welts, lacerations, and rope marks
- broken bones
- open wounds, cuts, punctures, untreated injuries in various stages of healing
- broken eyeglasses/frames, or any physical signs of being punished or restrained
- laboratory findings of either an overdose or under dose medications
- individual's report being hit, slapped, kicked, or mistreated
- vulnerable adult's sudden change in behavior
- the caregiver's refusal to allow visitors to see a vulnerable adult alone

**Sexual abuse** is nonconsensual sexual contact (any unwanted sexual contact). Examples include unwanted touching, rape, sodomy, coerced nudity, sexual explicit photographing.

***What are the signs of sexual abuse?***

- bruises, black eyes, welts, lacerations, and rope marks
- broken bones
- open wounds, cuts, punctures, untreated injuries in various stages of healing
- broken eyeglasses/frames, or any physical signs of being punished or restrained
- laboratory findings of either an overdose or under dose medications
- individual's report being hit, slapped, kicked, or mistreated
- vulnerable adult's sudden change in behavior
- the caregiver's refusal to allow visitors to see a vulnerable adult alone

**Mental mistreatment or emotional abuse** is deliberately causing mental or emotional pain. Examples include intimidation, coercion, ridiculing, harassment, treating an adult like a child, isolating an adult from family, friends, or regular activity, use of silence to control behavior, and yelling or swearing which results in mental distress.

***What are the signs of mental mistreatment or emotional abuse?***

- being emotionally upset or agitated
- being extremely withdrawn and non communicative or non responsive
- unusual behavior usually attributed to dementia (e.g., sucking, biting, rocking)
- nervousness around certain people
- an individual's report of being verbally or mentally mistreated

**Exploitation** occurs when a vulnerable adult or his/her resources or income are illegally or improperly used for another person's profit or gain. Examples include illegally withdrawing money out of another person's account, forging checks, or stealing things out of the vulnerably adult's house.

***What are the signs of exploitation?***

- sudden changes in bank account or banking practice, including an unexplained withdrawal of large sums of money
- adding additional names on bank signature cards
- unauthorized withdrawal of funds using an ATM card
- abrupt changes in a will or other financial documents
- unexplained disappearance of funds or valuable possessions
- bills unpaid despite the money being available to pay them
- forging a signature on financial transactions or for the titles of possessions
- sudden appearance of previously uninvolved relatives claiming rights to a vulnerable adult's possessions
- unexplained sudden transfer of assets to a family member or someone outside the family
- providing services that are not necessary
- individual's report of exploitation

**Neglect** occurs when a person, either through his/her action or inaction, deprives a vulnerable adult of the care necessary to maintain the vulnerable adult's physical or mental health. Examples include not providing basic items such as food, water, clothing, a safe place to live, medicine, or health care.

***What are the signs of neglect?***

- dehydration, malnutrition, untreated bed sores and poor personal hygiene
- unattended or untreated health problems
- hazardous or unsafe living condition (e.g., improper wiring, no heat or running water)
- unsanitary and unclean living conditions (e.g., dirt, fleas, lice on person, soiled bedding, fecal/urine smell, inadequate clothing)
- an individual's report of being mistreated

**Self-neglect** occurs when a vulnerable adult fails to provide adequately for themselves and jeopardizes his/her well-being. Examples include a vulnerable adult living in hazardous, unsafe, or unsanitary living conditions or not having enough food or water.

***What are the signs of self-neglect?***

- dehydration, malnutrition, untreated or improperly attended medical conditions, and poor personal hygiene
- hazardous or unsafe living conditions
- unsanitary or unclean living quarters (e.g., animal/insect infestation, no functioning toilet, fecal or urine smell)
- inappropriate and/or inadequate clothing, lack of the necessary medical aids
- grossly inadequate housing or homelessness
- inadequate medical care, not taking prescribed medications properly

**Abandonment** occurs when a vulnerable adult is left without the ability to obtain necessary food, clothing, shelter or health care. Examples include deserting a vulnerable adult in a public place or leaving a vulnerable adult at home without the means of getting basic life necessities.

***What are the signs of abandonment?***

- deserting a vulnerable adult in a public place
- deserting a vulnerable adult in his/her own home or living space
- individual's report of being abandoned

## Preventing Abuse

*Every vulnerable adult has the right to be safe and happy within his or her home. Below are ways you can help prevent abuse.*

### ***6 Tips on what you can do to help prevent abuse of a vulnerable adult***

1. Keep a watchful eye out for family, friends, and neighbors who may be vulnerable.
2. Understand that abuse can happen to anyone and know what to look for by familiarizing yourself with the “Types and Signs of Abuse” above.
3. Speak up if you have concerns. Trust your instincts!
4. Find ways to limit the person's isolation if that is an issue. Discuss options with him/her or encourage him/her to contact someone who can.
5. Report any suspicions you have of abuse by calling **1-866 END-HARM**.
6. Spread the word. Share what you've learned.

## Mandatory Reporters

Mandatory Reporters are professionals identified by law who MUST make a report if they have reason to believe that the abuse, abandonment, neglect, or financial exploitation of a vulnerable adult has occurred.

### ***Who are mandatory reporters?***

- Employees of the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS).
- Law Enforcement.
- Social Workers.
- Professional School Personnel.
- Contracted Individual Providers caring for a DSHS client.
- Employees of a social service, welfare, mental health, **home care**, hospice, home health, adult day care, and adult day health agency.
- Owners or employees of nursing homes, boarding homes, or adult family homes.
- Health Care Providers subject to Title 18 RCW (such as nurses and doctors).
- Christian Science Practitioner.

### ***What should you expect when reporting?***

You will be asked to give the person's name, address, contact information and details about why you are concerned. You will also be asked for your name and number or some way of contacting you if the investigator has follow up questions. Unless there is a court action, law enforcement has been called in, or you agree, your identity is confidential. If you report in good faith, you cannot be held liable for any damages resulting from reporting.

## ***What should you expect from Adult Protective Services?***

### **APS will:**

- Determine if an investigation by APS is appropriate under the law.
- Report suspected criminal activity to law enforcement.
- Interview the alleged victim, alleged perpetrator, witnesses, and any other person relevant to the situation.
- Based upon collected evidence, determine if abuse, abandonment, neglect, self-neglect, or financial exploitation occurred.
- Offer protective services to the alleged victim.
- Collaborate with others for ongoing services.
- Make appropriate referrals.

### **APS cannot:**

- Provide services without the alleged victim's consent.
- Remove the alleged victim from his/her home against his/her will.

If you are uncertain that what you are hearing or seeing is abuse, abandonment, neglect, self-neglect, or financial exploitation, call the appropriate reporting number and consult with the intake worker.

APS business hours are Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. If you call your local APS intake number after hours or on a weekend or holiday, you will get a recording instructing you to leave a detailed message. Make sure that you leave a phone number so the APS intake worker can call you back. Leaving this message meets your obligation by law to report the mistreatment of vulnerable adults. The APS intake worker will call you back the next business day.

***\*If at any time you are uncertain of the specifics of what to look for, what constitutes abuse or neglect, what is expected of you as a mandatory reporter, or anything else in regards to reporting abuse, please call Northwest Senior Care at (206) 910-8177 and ask to speak to a manager.***