



News Column for Week of May 25, 2020

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Elder Abuse and What You Should Know

No one is immune to elder abuse – it can happen to anyone, at any time, and anywhere. Often a silent problem, elder abuse can rob older adults of their dignity and security and leave them feeling fearful, depressed, and alone.

Sadly, 10 percent of Americans over the age of 60 have experienced some form of elder abuse in the last year, and many researchers expect this number to rise with the growth of the aging population. Yet, it is a topic we are not readily willing to talk about. We “don’t want to think about it,” or we “don’t want to admit that it happens.”

Elder abuse (sometimes referred to as elder mistreatment) is an intentional act, or failure to act, that causes harm to an adult. Abuse can be categorized as physical, emotional or psychological, sexual, neglect, abandonment, or financial exploitation.

A majority of abuse victims are older women who are vulnerable. They may be socially isolated, may have a mental impairment, or other disability. Often the abuse victim is dependent on others for help with activities of everyday life. People who are frail may appear to be easy victims.

The warning signs of abuse can be different for individuals depending on the type, frequency, and magnitude of abuse. Warning signs can include unexplained bruises or welts, withdrawal from normal activities, trouble sleeping, depression or confusion, or weight loss for no reason. Signs of trauma, such as rocking back and forth, poor hygiene, the unexpected absence of a caregiver, or a sudden change in financial situation can be other signs of abuse.

Here are some things to keep in mind to help prevent elder abuse.

- If you are a caregiver, ask for help when you need a break. Caregiving for a loved one is very rewarding, but can be challenging, very demanding and stressful.

- Remain involved in your loved one's care at care facilities and at home.
- Be attentive to sudden changes in mood, appearance, and health, especially if a decline in mental ability (dementia) is taking place.
- Educate your loved ones on what scams and schemes can look and sound like and what to do if they feel uncomfortable in a situation reflecting pressure or scare tactics.
- Encourage your loved one to be cautious with their financial affairs. Monitor financial accounts if necessary, and avoid making rash spending decisions.
- Encourage your loved one to create financial and health care-related advance planning documents.
- If you suspect or see elder abuse, report it immediately.

If someone is in immediate danger, call 911. For domestic or community abuse, contact Kansas Department for Children and Families Adult Protective Services at 1-800-922-5330. For suspected abuse in a care facility, contact Kansas Department for Aging and Disability Services at 1-800-842-0078.

For other resources or questions related to elder abuse, contact the Yates Center Southwind Extension District office at 620-625-8620.