

How Can I Tell if Mom's Being Treated Well or if She Needs More Help?

Excerpts from National Institute on Aging and VA Department of Social Services

From a distance it may be hard to assess the quality of your parent's caregivers. Ideally, a primary caregiver on the scene can keep tabs on how things are going. Perhaps friends and neighbors can stop in unannounced to be your eyes and ears. You can stay in touch by phone and take note of any mood changes that may indicate mistreatment or neglect. These can happen in any setting, and at any socio-economic level. Abuse can take many forms, including domestic violence, emotional abuse, financial abuse, theft, and basic neglect.

Each year many older adults and younger adults who are incapacitated are victims of mistreatment by family members, by caregivers, and by others responsible for their well-being. Sometimes the abuser is a hired caregiver. Sometimes the stress of caring for an aging parent or spouse takes a toll, and family caregivers may lash out verbally or physically, either intentionally or unintentionally. But no matter who the caregiver is, or what the cause, abuse and neglect are never acceptable responses.

Possible Signs of Elder Abuse:

- Bruises, pressure marks, broken bones, abrasions, and burns may be signs of physical abuse or neglect.
- Unexplained withdrawal from normal activities, a sudden change in alertness, and unusual depression may indicate emotional abuse.
- Sudden financial losses may be the result of exploitation.
- Bedsores, unattended medical needs, poor hygiene, and unusual unexplained weight loss can be signs of neglect
- Belittling, threats, and other uses of power and control by spouses and other adults may signify verbal or emotional abuse.
- A sudden change in will or power of attorney

Perhaps your parent still lives independently, but you're worried about self-neglect. Self neglect refers to situations in which older people put themselves at high risk. Here are some signs that may mean it's time to intervene.

- Hoarding
- Failure to take essential medications or refusal to seek medical treatment for serious illness.
- Leaving a burning stove unattended
- Poor hygiene
- Not wearing suitable clothing for the weather
- Confusion
- Inability to attend to housekeeping
- Dehydration
- Lacks needed dentures, glasses, or hearing aids

- Severe anxiety, fearfulness, or depression
- Unpaid bills
- Property or savings are mismanaged

If you feel your parent is in physical danger, contact the authorities right away. If you suspect abuse, but do not feel there is an immediate risk, contact someone who can act on your behalf: your parent's doctor, for instance, or your contact at a home health agency. Suspected abuse must be reported to Adult Protective Services.

An APS report is confidential. Your name can not be revealed without your permission. Reports can also be made anonymously. Reporters are immune from civil and criminal liability for making a good-faith report.

If you or someone you know is being mistreated, or you fear dangerous self-neglect, contact your local department of social services and ask for an APS worker, or you may call the **24-hour toll-free hotline 1-888-832-3858**

<http://www.dssvirginia.gov/index.html>

Remember, abuse hurts at any age!