



Making *Life Easier*™

Golden Years are Time to Age in Place with Dignity, Not Fear

Americans are living longer, healthier and more productive lives these days. With more people turning age 65 than ever before in history, what was previously known as the “Age Wave” is now being referred to as the “Silver Tsunami.” In fact, the fastest-growing demographic in America is people age 85 and older. In honor of aging well with dignity and independence, we now celebrate Older Americans Month in May.

While a longer life expectancy is certainly something to celebrate, it is not without its challenges. According to the Administration on Aging, approximately one-third of people age 65 and older live alone, and an estimated 40% of older adults struggle with daily living activities associated with independent living. When older people are limited physically and socially, many become isolated and vulnerable to abuse and mistreatment.

Over the past decade, there has been a sharp increase in the number of reported cases of elder abuse. Recent estimates suggest that one in eight older Americans are mistreated each year, typically by a family member or someone considered trustworthy. The reported prevalence of abuse is believed to be the ‘*tip of the iceberg*,’ implying the problem is far worse.

The Golden Years should be a time in which people can enjoy life and age in place with dignity. No one should live in fear of their safety as a result of ongoing abusive situations. Do not let a possible victim suffer in silence. Every year, June 15 is honored as International Elder Abuse Awareness and Prevention Day. Elder abuse and neglect are significant problems, and education is one of the first steps to help put an end to these horrible injustices.

Types of Elder Abuse and Mistreatment

In most cases of abuse and mistreatment, the abuser typically has power and control over the victim. In certain cases, threats of physical or sexual abuse are acted out, and victims find themselves helpless. In other cases, the victims may experience verbal and emotional abuse. They may be yelled at, told they are worthless, or hear constant threats of “I’ll put you on the street” or “...move you to a nursing home.” This causes the victim to feel hopeless. In yet other cases, coercion and deceit lead to financial abuse. The victim is exploited and loses their money and material possessions, which may lead to a life of marginal existence.

Self-neglect occurs in an estimated 50% of the cases of elder abuse and mistreatment. These older adults are unable to care for themselves properly and are living in unsanitary and unsafe environments where medical needs and daily living activities are not adequately addressed. Neglect can occur when the people responsible for caring for their aging family members fail to provide proper care, whether due to a lack of coping skills, oversight or intentional behavior.

Types of Abuse & Signs/Symptoms

Neglect – Failure to care for someone unable or unwilling to care for self, whether intentional or unintentional.

Self-Neglect – Behaviors of an older person that threaten his/her own health or safety.

Signs/Symptoms – Poor hygiene, filthy living conditions, apparent lack of basic medical care, soiled clothing, bedsores, dehydration, malnourishment, etc.

Physical – Use of force resulting in bodily injury.

Signs/Symptoms – Unexplained bruises, cuts, swelling, broken bones, marks on the skin, burns, etc.

Sexual – Unwanted or threatened sexual contact.

Signs/Symptoms – Submissiveness, avoidance of eye contact, shame, jumpy or twitch if touched.

Emotional – Use of pressure, intimidation, harassment, isolation, etc. which leads to distress.

Signs/Symptoms – Hesitation to speak openly, denial of a problem(s), fear, apparent depression or guilt, etc.

Financial or Material Exploitation – Use of funds or personal property through acts of coercion, deception or theft without benefit to the older adult

Signs/Symptoms – Unexplained transfers or expenses, overcharging for goods/services, missing or unexplained use of checks, cash, credit, property, etc.

Source: www.SafeAfter60.org. Used with permission.

If You Suspect Elder Abuse or Mistreatment

“Elder abuse is not a family matter that is ‘*none of my business*,’” said Mary Doepke, RN, Owner of Home Helpers. “It is horrific acts against older adults who often have more concern about the consequences for the abuser than they do for their own safety. If you suspect an older person is experiencing any of the signs and symptoms listed above, turn it over to the professionals and let them investigate the situation. You can file a report with your local Adult Protective Services. Visit www.ElderCare.gov or call 800-677-1116 to find the number for your area location. As the saying goes, ‘*better safe than sorry*.’”

Additional Resources

To learn more about elder abuse prevention the following websites offer helpful and insightful information.

- National Adult Protective Services Association – www.apsnetwork.org/Abuse/index.html
- International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse – Home Helpers has partnered with INPEA to prevent and bring an end to elder abuse. Visit <http://inpea.net> to learn more.

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Home Helpers offers quality non-medical and personal care* and companionship services similar to the care and support often provided by family members. Our flexible care plans are tailored to fit our clients’ specific needs and budgets. *Call us today for a free consultation.*

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