



A Division of the New York Legal Assistance Group

LegalHealth
Professional Partnership to Promote Well Being

This is general information, not legal advice. Patients should consult an attorney for specific guidance.

Elder Abuse Screening and Safety Planning

Elder abuse is a pattern of mistreatment or neglect that causes actual harm, the risk of harm or distress to any individual **60 years of age or older**, which often includes the threat or use of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, neglect, abandonment and financial exploitation.

What patients should I screen for elder abuse?

- ◆ In general, elderly individuals who need help may include patients who:
 - Have a physical and/or mental impairment;
 - Cannot protect themselves from abuse or neglect;
 - S/he may present with unexplained injuries; unkempt or unclean appearance; sleep deprivation; signs of drugging or improper use of medications; or unexplained STDs.
 - Appear emotionally distressed (crying and/or depression), or withdrawn;
 - Appear dependent upon an abusive, stressed, mentally impaired, or otherwise inadequate caregiver.
- ◆ An elderly individual may be at risk for **financial exploitation** if S/he is:
 - Neglected, or receiving insufficient care given the individual's financial status;
 - Social or physical isolation;
 - S/he is not given the opportunity to speak with others without the caregiver, family member, or acquaintance present and/or this person appears too interested in the victim's financial status.
 - Other risk factors include: S/he is confused about missing funds in their account; unable to remember financial transactions or signing paperwork; disparity between assets and living conditions; nervous or acting unusual, around a caregiver; unable to make decisions, or speak for oneself.

How can I help a patient create a safety plan?

- ◆ If elder abuse is suspected, arrange to speak with the individual away from any caregivers, family members, or acquaintances who may routinely accompany him/her to appointments;
 - Ensure that S/he has glasses, hearing aids, etc. in order to fully participate in your conversation;
 - Broach the topic of elder abuse in a non-invasive, respectful manner to create a comfortable environment for the individual to open up because victims of elder abuse are prone to feelings of fear and shame.
- ◆ Try your best to develop a communication plan so that S/he can contact you independently;
- ◆ Contact police or Adult Protective Services if you believe S/he is at risk for elder abuse.

For Adult Protective Services, call 1-844-697-3505. For more information, please visit the New York State Office of Children and Family Services, Bureau of Adult Services, for more information about Protective Services for Adults and Family-Type Homes for Adults: <http://ocfs.ny.gov/main/psa/>.

How can I help a patient implement safeguards against elder abuse?

- Have a conversation early on with your patients before they have diminished capacity to help them identify a person they trust and to consider executing a Power of Attorney and Health Care Proxy.

More questions? Refer patients for an appointment with a LegalHealth attorney

www.legalhealth.org

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