

What is Adult Abuse?

The term “**adult abuse**” generally means mistreatment of frail or disabled persons who may not be able to protect themselves from harm. Although the term “adult abuse” is commonly used in reference to persons who are 60 years and older, approximately 28 percent of the vulnerable adults in Virginia who are known to be victims of abuse are adults with disabilities who are younger than 60 years.

FACTS ABOUT ADULT ABUSE

- ◆ Close to 12,000 reports of adult abuse in Virginia were investigated by Adult Protective Services last year.
- ◆ Abuse, neglect, or exploitation was substantiated in 61 percent of the reports
- ◆ Reports of neglect and self-neglect account for more than 67 percent of the reports.
- ◆ Adults who need protection and are able to make decisions for themselves have a right to refuse help.

TYPES OF ADULT ABUSE

The term “adult abuse” or “elder abuse” includes a wide variety of abusive behaviors, including:

- ◆ **PHYSICAL ABUSE** — the intentional infliction of physical pain or injury.
- ◆ **MENTAL OR PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE** — the intentional infliction of mental anguish by threat, intimidation, humiliation, or other means.
- ◆ **SEXUAL ABUSE** — unwanted sexual activity.
- ◆ **NEGLECT** — the lack of necessary assistance to keep physically and mentally healthy.
- ◆ **SELF-NEGLECT** — the failure to provide self with the necessities of life, such as food, clothing, shelter, needed medical care, and reasonable financial management.
- ◆ **FINANCIAL EXPLOITATION** — the illegal use of an incapacitated adult’s resources for another’s profit or advantage.



CHARACTERISTICS OF VICTIMS AND ABUSERS

- ◆ The U.S. House of Representatives Select Committee on Aging reports that the most likely victims of adult abuse are women, persons age 75 or older, individuals who are isolated and dependent on others for care (AARP)
- ◆ More than two-thirds of adult abuse perpetrators are family members, most often an adult child or spouse (AARP).
- ◆ In Virginia, the greatest number of reports to adult protective services in 2003 were for elders who lived with a spouse or relative, followed by reports on persons living alone.

Indicators of Adult Abuse, Neglect, or Exploitation

Physical Signs

- ✓ Dehydration or malnutrition
- ✓ Broken bones
- ✓ Pain from touching
- ✓ Scratches, punctures, burns, bruises
- ✓ Soiled clothing or bed

Signs of Caregiver Abuse

- ✓ Forced isolation
- ✓ Lack of affection or care for the adult
- ✓ Communicates to others that adult is a burden
- ✓ Conflicting stories or accounts of details
- ✓ Prevents adult from speaking with others
- ✓ Prevents visitation from family and friends
- ✓ Inappropriate sexual relationship or language
- ✓ History of mental illness, criminal behavior, or family violence

Psychological/Behavioral Signs

- ✓ Depression
- ✓ Lack of communication and talking
- ✓ Isolation or withdrawal
- ✓ Anxiety
- ✓ Anger
- ✓ Frequent change of healthcare professionals

Signs of Financial Exploitation

- ✓ Missing personal belongings
- ✓ Suspicious signatures
- ✓ Frequent checks made out to "cash"
- ✓ Elder has no knowledge of monthly income
- ✓ Numerous unpaid bills
- ✓ Discrepancies in tax returns
- ✓ Large bank withdrawal
- ✓ Unusual bank activity
- ✓ A changed will

To report adult abuse, neglect, or exploitation, please call your local department of social services or the 24-hour toll-free hotline at

1-888-832-3858.

Spanish Translation

El Respeto Al Adulto Vulnerable

Posibles señales de maltrato, descuido o explotación

Señales físicas

Deshidratación o desnutrición sin que haya una enfermedad
Fracturas de los huesos
Dolor al tocar
Ropa o cama sucia
Cortadas, pinchazos, quemaduras, moretones y lesiones

Señales de comportamiento

Depresión
Vacilación para hablar francamente
Aislamiento y abstinencia
Ansiedad, enojo
Hospitalización o búsqueda de atención médica con frecuencia

Señales de la persona encargada del cuidado

Falta de afecto hacia la persona de edad
Expresa a otros que las personas de edad son una carga
Antecedentes de abuso de sustancias, enfermedad mental, conducta criminal o violencia familiar
Narraciones contradictorias sobre incidentes
Prohibición a que la persona de edad hable o vea a otras personas
Prohibición de visitas a los familiares y amigos
Coqueteo o timidez que indiquen posiblemente una relación sexual inadecuada

Señales de abuso económico

Perdida de objetos íntimos de la persona de edad
Desconocimiento de la persona de edad del porqué se ha hecho una cita con el banco o con un abogado
Cheques hechos con frecuencia al "portador"
Irregularidades en la declaración de impuestos
Desconocimiento de parte de la persona de edad de sus ingresos mensuales
Retiros en cantidades grandes de la cuenta del banco
Actividad extraña en la cuenta del banco
Un cambio reciente en el testamento

Para reportar un caso de maltrato, descuido o explotación, por favor llame a su oficina local del Departamento de Servicios Sociales o al

1-888-832-3858.

Adult Protective Services for Health Professionals

- According to the National Center on Elder Abuse, only one out of 14 domestic adult abuse cases is reported.
- Health professionals, including nurses, doctors, pharmacists, and dentists, frequently care for an adult in need of protective services.
- Health professionals are mandated reporters according to the *Code of Virginia*. This means that health professionals are required by law to report suspected cases of abuse, neglect, or exploitation of an elder or adult with disabilities to Adult Protective Services (APS) at their local department of social services.
- In a study conducted in 1997 by the Medical College of Virginia, only 19 percent of doctors had received training on adult abuse.
- APS assists clients who are 60 years of age and older and adults 18 years of age and older with a disability who have been neglected, abused, or exploited or may be at risk.
- Many cases of neglect, abuse, and exploitation are undetected because of lack of knowledge.
- If an adult is being abused, neglected, or exploited, he or she may not show up for appointments or may frequently change health care providers.
- Abused, neglected, or exploited adults are more likely to change doctors, but retain their dentist.
- Signs of abuse, neglect, or exploitation include:
 - ✓ verbal abuse by a caregiver
 - ✓ lesions
 - ✓ cigarette burns
 - ✓ bruises
 - ✓ tooth fractures
 - ✓ bites
 - ✓ bone fractures on x-rays
 - ✓ hemorrhage
 - ✓ delay in medical care, and
 - ✓ poor dental hygiene
 - ✓ retinal detachment
 - ✓ pharmaceuticals not being picked up
- If there is suspicion of abuse, neglect, or exploitation, call and report to the local department of social services. Speak with an APS professional.
- Calls to APS may help provide services for adults in need and can be anonymous (under the *Code of Virginia*).

**To contact adult protective services, call your local department of social services or the 24-hour toll-free hotline at
1-888-832-3858.**

Questions Relating to Adult Abuse and Neglect for Health Professionals

The American Medical Association's 1992 publication "*Diagnostic and Treatment Guidelines on Adult Abuse and Neglect*" suggests that physicians should incorporate routine questions related to adult abuse and neglect into their daily practice. The protocol should include specific questions for the patient. Suggested questions include:

- ☐ Has anyone at home ever hurt you?
- ☐ Has anyone ever touched you without your consent?
- ☐ Has anyone taken anything that was yours without asking?
- ☐ Has anyone ever threatened you?
- ☐ Have you ever signed any documents that you didn't understand or you didn't want to sign?
- ☐ Are you afraid of anyone at home?
- ☐ Are you alone a lot?
- ☐ Has anyone ever failed to help you take care of yourself when you needed help?

Caregiver Stress or Domestic Violence?

... You visit your neighbors, an elderly couple in their 70's. When you arrive, you're shocked to notice that the wife has bruises on her face and arms. When you inquire about the bruises, her husband says, "I love my wife dearly. But, you can't understand how difficult things are now. She can't take care of herself, keep the house clean, or cook meals. I lost control for a few seconds and hit her just once. It'll never happen again ... I love her so much."

What's the difference between caregiver stress and domestic violence?

Caregiver Stress

- The stress of providing long-term, unrelieved care may cause a caregiver to become abusive.
- Stressed caregivers know hurting another person is wrong. They feel remorse and shame.
- Stressed caregivers often want to help end the abuse.
- Stressed caregivers acknowledge the harmful effects of their actions.

Domestic Violence in Later Life

- Domestic violence is a pattern of abusive behaviors, including physical, emotional, and/or sexual abuse. It is not caused by stress.
- Batterers may express remorse, but feel justified in using abusive tactics over another person to exert control.
- Batterers are not likely to feel responsible for ending the abuse. They will often blame the abuse on the victim.
- Batterers minimize, deny, and blame others for the abuse.

Why does it matter? Successful interventions in cases of stressed caregivers differ greatly from appropriate domestic violence interventions. If the interventions do not fit the problem, the results can be dangerous.

- **Appropriate interventions for caregiver stress:** Support and compassion for caregiver and victim. Counseling, respite care, and adult day care.
- **If domestic violence intervention is used in cases of caregiver stress:** Caregiver does not receive support necessary to reduce stress and improve capacity to provide care.
- **Appropriate intervention for domestic violence later in life:** Safety planning, legal advocacy, and support for the victim. Information on dynamics of domestic abuse for the victim and batterer. Holding the batterer accountable for abuse.
- **If caregiver stress intervention is used in cases of domestic violence:** Victim receives message that s/he is to blame for the abuse; perpetrator gets supported in minimizing the violence and blaming the victim; the victim is further isolated and placed in more danger; the abuse continues.