



# The Facts About Adult Abuse and Neglect in Georgia

Last time you visited your aunt, she had bruises and you wondered how they got there. Perhaps you suspect your elderly neighbor isn't caring for himself the way he used to. It could be elder abuse. What should you look for, and what can you do?

- Abuse of older and disabled people is one of the most underreported social problems in the U.S.
  - Elder abuse is usually intentional. It can involve harming or distressing an older person or not doing something that a person has a duty to do, such as a caregiver not providing medications to an older adult who needs them. Depending on the law an older person is defined as either a person who is 60 or 65 years and older.
  - The definitions, indicators, and types of abuse may also apply to persons with disabilities (age 18 and over).
  - Abuse can occur in a person's own home or in a community living arrangement such as assisted living, personal care homes or nursing homes. A family member, a friend, a caregiver or a stranger can be abusive. More than 2/3 of the abusers are family members serving in a caregiving role. The abuser could be someone an older adult relies on or even pays, such as a lawyer, an accountant, a guardian or a nurses' aide. Some abusers actively seek out people to victimize.
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Elder and disabled adult abuse occurs when someone intentionally causes harm or puts at risk of harm to an older or disabled adult. Neglect occurs when someone intentionally or unknowingly withholds basic necessities or care. Self-neglect refers to a person's inability to provide care and support to himself or herself. Elder and disabled adult abuse can take several forms, including:

- **Physical abuse** - using physical force to coerce or to inflict bodily harm. It often, but not always, causes physical discomfort, pain or injury. It may include the willful deprivation of essential services, such as medical care, food or water.
- **Emotional abuse** - using tactics, such as harassment, insults, intimidation or threats that cause mental or emotional anguish or isolation. It diminishes the person's sense of identity, dignity, and self worth.
- **Sexual abuse** - any kind of sexual behavior directed towards an older adult or mentally incapable adult without the person's full knowledge and consent. A spouse, partner, family member or other trusted person, can perpetrate sexual abuse.
- **Financial abuse or exploitation** - improperly or illegally using a person's resources for the benefit of another person, for example, by stealing, trickery or inappropriate use of government checks.
- **Neglect** - occurs when a caregiver refuses or fails to provide essential services to the degree that it harms or threatens to harm an older and/or disabled adult.
- **Self-neglect** - failing to perform essential self-care such as depriving him/herself of necessities such as food, water, or medication. Consciously putting oneself in harm's way. Unable to handle day-to-day living because of medical or mental health problems.

If you're concerned an older adult might be abused, knowing the signs and symptoms of abuse can help. Changes in an older person's behavior or emotional state may suggest a problem. Examples to look for are agitation, apathy, withdrawal, fear or anxiety, comments about being mistreated, or the refusal of the caregiver to allow you to visit the older person alone. **Some indicators of abuse, neglect and exploitation include:**





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### Physical Abuse:

- Pushing, striking, slapping, pinching, beating
- Burning or scalding
- Hitting with a hand or instrument
- Rough handling
- Improper use of restraints or medications
- Intentional injuries such as bruising, burns, broken bones, or pain
- Injuries that are not consistent with medical diagnosis or explanation
- Forcing someone to remain in a bed or chair
- Forcing someone to remain in a room (including locking them in).

### Emotional Abuse:

- Threatening someone with violence, abandonment, or neglect
- Verbal abuse including: threats, insults, harassment, name calling, intimidating
- Isolating from friends, family, or activities
- Ignoring or excessively criticizing; giving the silent treatment
- Making derogative or slanderous statements
- Repeatedly raising the issue of death
- Excluding the older person from decision making when he or she is capable and wants to be included

## WARNING SIGNS

### Sexual Abuse:

- Any nonconsensual sexual contact
- Inappropriate touching
- Forced viewing of sexually explicit materials
- Sexual assault or rape
- Sexual harassment



### Financial Abuse or Exploitation:

- Misuse of financial resources for another's gain
- Missing money or valuables
- Credit card charges the individual did not make
- Unusual activity in bank accounts, depleted bank accounts
- Legal documents (such as will or power of attorney) signed by a person who does not understand what s/he is signing
- Checks/documents signed when person cannot write; signatures on checks that don't resemble the person's signature
- Eviction notice arrives when person thought s/he owned the house
- Unpaid bills (rent, utilities, taxes) when someone is supposed to be paying them for the person

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### Neglect:

- Failure to provide or purposely withholding shelter, clothing, food, water, medical care, or other basic needs
- Malnourishment, dehydration, or weight loss inconsistent with medical diagnosis
- Ignoring, leaving the person alone for long periods of time
- Unsanitary or unsafe living conditions: rats, roaches, human or animal waste on floors or furniture; house filled with trash, rotting floors, falling ceiling, no toilet
- Untreated medical conditions or injuries
- Lack of clothing or inappropriate clothing for weather
- Extreme dirtiness of bedding or lying in own waste
- Decayed teeth or lacks needed false teeth
- Lacks needed glasses or hearing aids
- Bed sores or rashes

### Self Neglect:

- Lacking food or basic utilities
- Failing to meet daily basic needs
- Not recognizing their limitations
- Refusing to take medications
- Neglecting personal hygiene
- Wearing soiled or ragged clothes



- Senior Adult Victims' Advocate or SAVA, 404-657-5250 or outside Metro Atlanta 1-888-774-0152. SAVA provides services for adults age 60 and older who are victims of abuse, neglect, or exploitation by serving as a liaison between victims, social service agencies and the court system. SAVA provides telephone assurance, assistance with court appearances, access to support groups, and help navigating the legal system. If someone is refusing services but may still be at risk for abuse, neglect and/or exploitation, call SAVA.
- The Governor's Office of Consumer Affairs or OCA, (404) 651-8600 or outside Metro Atlanta 1-800-869-1123, enforces the Fair Business Practices Act and other consumer protection laws. It also mediates consumer complaints, investigates and addresses consumer problems, takes necessary civil action against offending businesses. OCA works to prosecute crimes related to telemarketing, home construction and home repair fraud, identity theft and Internet fraud.
- Elderly Legal Assistance Program (ELAP), (404) 657-5319 to find local resources or call your Area Agency on Aging, ELAP provides legal assistance for civil matters for people 60 years of age and older.
- Senior Legal Hotline, (404) 657-9915 outside Metro Atlanta 1-888-257-9519, provides legal assistance over the telephone for Georgians 60 years of age and older.
- GeorgiaCares, 1-800-669-8387, provides free health insurance counseling for Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries. GeorgiaCares also reports suspected fraud in Medicare and Medicaid. Call if you have questions about your health insurance or suspect fraud.

All services listed above are free of charge regardless of income.

## OTHER HELPFUL SERVICES

Many people are required by Georgia law to report when they suspect abuse, neglect or exploitation. Mandated reporters must make a report when they have a reasonable cause to believe that a disabled or elder adult has had an injury or injuries inflicted upon them, other than by accidental means, by a caretaker or has been neglected or exploited by a caretaker. Mandated reporters who do not fulfill their obligation to report elder or disabled adult abuse may be charged with a misdemeanor. Georgia law lists mandated reporters at Code Section 30-5-8 for alleged victims who are disabled adults or elder persons who live in the community; and at Code Section 31-8-80 for alleged victims who are long-term care facility residents. All other parties are encouraged to make reports if they believe that a disabled adult or elder person is in need of protective services or has been the victim of abuse, neglect, or exploitation. By law the following are mandated reporters of abuse, neglect, and exploitation:

- Physicians (including interns and residents)
- Osteopaths
- Dentists
- Chiropractors
- Podiatrist
- Psychologists
- Licensed professionals counselors
- Social workers
- Employees of a public or private agency engaged in professional health-related services to elder persons or disabled adults
- Adult Day care personnel
- Other hospital or medical personnel
- Pharmacists
- Physical therapists
- Occupational therapists
- Nursing personnel
- Coroners and medical examiners
- Nursing personnel
- Any employee of a financial institution
- Law enforcement personnel
- Administrators, managers or other employees of a personal care home or nursing home

Anyone who makes a report of fraud, testifies in any judicial proceeding, assists protective services, or participates in a required investigation is immune from any civil or criminal liability as a result of such report, testimony, or participation, unless such person acted in bad faith or with a malicious purpose, or was a party to such crime or fraud.

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If you suspect abuse, you can do something about it. First, recognize the signs. Then, report the situation so it can be investigated. The problem can't be solved until it is reported.

- **Any Setting**

If immediate, serious risk, call the Police (911).

- **Community Setting**

If the suspected abuse, neglect or exploitation occurs in a person's home or other community setting then contact the Division of Aging Services' Adult Protective Services Central Intake in Metropolitan Atlanta 404-657-5250 or outside of Atlanta at 1-888-774-0152. Your report is confidential and the law protects anyone from a lawsuit who reports abuse.

- **Long Term Care Facility or Residence including:**

Nursing Facility, Personal Care Home (including assisted living), and Community Living Arrangement  
The DHR Office of Regulatory Services is responsible for investigating reports in these facilities.  
Call (404) 657-5728 or (404) 657-5276 or the toll free number 800-878-6442.

- **Long Term Care Ombudsman**

If you or a someone you know needs an advocate in any of the long term care facilities then contact the local Long-Term Care Ombudsman who is authorized to advocate for residents in long term care. To find your local long term care ombudsman, call your Area Agency on Aging (the number is in your blue pages of any telephone directory) or call the **Office of State Long-term Care Ombudsman at (404) 463-8383 or 1-888-454-5826.**

## For More Information about Elder Abuse Contact:

### For Additional Brochures Contact:

Two Peachtree Street, NW, Suite 9-398  
Atlanta, GA 30303-3142

Information and Assistance: 404-657-5319

FAX 404-657-5285

Website: <http://aging.dhr.georgia.gov>

