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## **Abuse Hurts At Any Age**

### **Elder Abuse**

Hundreds of thousands of older adults are victims of mistreatment. Many victims cannot get help for themselves. Abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation of older adults is largely a hidden problem and is difficult to stop. Adults most at risk of mistreatment depend on others for some of their basic needs. Often the mistreatment happens when a caregiver is overwhelmed with caregiving duties. The stress of providing care over a period of time may result in mistreatment by the caregiver. The support of the general public and professional persons who know or work with older adults is needed to find those who are being mistreated and to get them help.

The number of known cases of elder abuse in Virginia increases each year. While we know this is a serious problem in Virginia and in the nation, the true extent is not known. National estimates are that approximately 5 percent of the nation's elderly become victims of some form of abuse.

### **Virginia Adult Protective Services**

Virginia [Adult Protective Services](#) (APS) investigates reports of abuse, neglect, and exploitation of adults aged 60 and over and incapacitated adults over 18 years of age and provides services when persons are found to be in need of protective services. The goal of APS is to protect a vulnerable adult's life, health, and property without a loss of liberty. When this is not possible, APS attempts to provide assistance with the least disruption of lifestyle and with full due process, protection, and restoration of the person's liberty in the shortest possible period of time. APS seeks to achieve simultaneously and in order of importance: freedom, safety, and minimal disruption of lifestyle and least-restrictive care.

To report suspected financial exploitation or other kinds of abuse to the elderly or adults with a disability, call your local department of social services or the **Virginia**

**Department of Social Services' 24-hour, toll-free Adult Protective Services hotline at: (888) 832-3858.**

## **Types of Abuse**

The term "elder abuse" generally means mistreatment of frail or disabled persons who may not be able to protect themselves from harm. Some kinds of mistreatment are:

**Physical abuse** means causing physical pain or injury. This can include the use of physical restraints or the use of drugs to keep a person immobile.

**Mental or psychological abuse** means causing pain or distress by threatening, frightening, embarrassing or ridiculing the adult.

**Sexual abuse** means unwanted sexual activity.

**Neglect** means the adult is not receiving the help needed to keep physically and mentally healthy and, as a result, is at risk of harm or even death.

**Self-neglect** means the adult does not receive the food, clothing, shelter, and/or medical care needed because of poverty. Sometimes a person who has a caregiver may be self-neglecting because he/she refuses to accept the help that is needed.

**Financial exploitation** means the adult's money or other property is being taken without his/her consent and used for someone else's benefit.

## **Reporting Abuse**

The department of social services in each county or city in Virginia has an [Adult Protective Services](#) program. Virginia law says that adult protective services is responsible for receiving and investigating reports of suspected elder abuse. Others who may become involved when there is abuse include: state and local ombudsmen, regulatory agencies, the department of health professions, human rights offices, law-enforcement agencies, and others.

Virginia law lists certain professional groups who are required to report to local departments of social services when they have reason to suspect that an elder is abused, neglected, or exploited. Those required to report include: doctors, persons who work in the nursing profession, social workers, mental health professionals, law-

enforcement officers, persons employed by a public or private agency or facility who work with adults, and persons providing full-time or part-time care to adults for pay.

Friends and neighbors, family and church members, utility workers, postal carriers, bankers, and any other person who is not required to report, but, who believes that an adult is abused, neglected or exploited are encouraged to make a report to the local department of social services.

Virginia law says that people who report suspected abuse, neglect, or exploitation to local departments of social services are free from any liability for making the report, unless the report is made in bad faith or with a malicious purpose. Likewise, persons who give evidence about the mistreatment are free of liability.

The name of the person who makes the report will be held confidential by the local department of social services. The name of the person who made the report cannot be revealed unless the person gives permission or the court orders that the name be revealed. You do not have to give your name when you make a report.

### **Investigation of Abuse**

A social worker reviews the information to decide whether to investigate. If there will be no investigation, the social worker will tell the person who made the report and explain why.

A social worker will visit the adult believed to be abused, neglected, or exploited. There will be a private interview with the adult. The interview will be used to gather information about the adult's situation and need for protection.

Interviews will be conducted with others, such as family members, doctors, etc. who have information that will help the social worker understand the older adult's situation. The purpose of the investigation is to learn if the adult needs protection.

The social worker will consider the adult's physical health, mental health, living arrangement, what the person can do for him/herself, and who is available to help. This information will help the social worker make a decision about whether the person needs help and, if so, what kind of help is needed.

### **Abuse Prevention**

The purpose of protective services is to stop the abuse, neglect, or exploitation. Help will vary depending on the person's situation. Sometimes the person is at high risk of being abused, neglected, or exploited. In such a case, the purpose of protective services is to reduce the risk so that the mistreatment does not occur.

Some examples of protective services which may be used to stop or prevent abuse, neglect, or exploitation are:

- Adult day care for a portion of a day in a setting which offers supervision of the adult and social activities, and may provide a rest period for the family member who is the caregiver.
- Counseling for the older adult and family members. The person who is causing the abuse may receive counseling.
- Emergency assistance may include basic help to an older adult in an emergency. Examples: emergency need for food, heat, medication, or medical treatment. If the adult is unable to request or agree to help, the local department of social services may ask the court to permit emergency help.
- Home support includes special help to the person in his/her home. This help may include:
  1. A person who helps with bathing, shopping, and light housekeeping;
  2. Home visits by a nurse or other health professionals; and
  3. Help with meal preparation or home-delivered meals or meals at a group site.
- Residential services may include:
  1. Improving the safety of current housing;
  2. Arranging for placement in a home that cares for adults or in an adult care group residence; and
  3. It may also include preadmission screening for nursing home placement.
- Medical services include help in getting a medical exam, when necessary, and also helping in getting needed medical care.

Anyone who suspects that an adult is being abused, neglected or financially or sexually exploited may make a report by calling the local department of social services or the 24-hour toll-free hotline at 888-832-3858. Persons who make a report may do so anonymously. Reporters should give the name, age and address or location of the person who is suspected of being abused. Information about the

abusive situation also should be provided.

Adapted with permission from the [Virginia Department of Social Services](#).

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