



ELDER ABUSE (information from Halt Elder Abuse Line)

What is Elder Abuse?

Elder abuse constitutes a single or repeated act or lack of appropriate action, which causes an older person harm or distress and usually occurs within a relationship where there is an expectation of trust. Elder abuse can take many forms, e.g. physical, emotional, financial, verbal, sexual, neglect, witchcraft and the violation of an older person's human rights. The cultural and / or religious beliefs of an older person must be considered in order to understand fully the impact of elder abuse on an individual.

Physical Violence:

Any act of physical violence (e.g. pushing, hitting, shaking, slapping) that cause physical harm are forms of abuse.

Signs to look for: Bruises, cuts, burns, swellings, unexplained injuries and pain, reduced mental or physical activity, distraction, depression.

Financial Abuse / Exploitation:

Any use, misuse or extortion of an older person's property and/or assets without their full consent; coercing older persons to sign documents that they have not or cannot read (because of being illiterate, poor eyesight); power of attorney given when the the older person is not able to fully comprehend the implications.

Signs to look for: A noticeable difference in the known income and standard of living, alterations to wills, missing possessions – (e.g. jewellery, clothing, ornaments, and furniture), unusual bank balances or transactions, disappearing bank statements, a shortage of food or clothing.

Sexual:

Sexual behaviour towards an older person without his/her full knowledge and/or consent including sexual harassment.

Signs to look for: Bruising, bleeding, pain or injury in the abdominal, anal and genital areas, recurrent bouts of cystitis, sexually transmitted diseases and/or symptoms of emotional abuse.

Psychological / Emotional:

Any act or acts that inflict emotional or mental suffering, verbal or non-verbal intimidation, shouting, insulting, humiliation, ignoring, threatening.

Signs to look for: Nervousness (especially in the presence of the perpetrator), agitation, anxiety, low self-esteem, fear and withdrawal.

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Neglect – Active and Passive, Self-Neglect:

Inadequate provision of food, clothing, shelter, medical treatment and/or essential medication required for the physical and mental well being of an older person, intentionally or unintentionally. Self-neglect is the behaviour of an older person that threatens his/her own health or safety. It excludes the rights of a mentally competent older person who fully understands the consequences of his/her decision e.g. to refuse medical treatment.

Signs to look for:

Malnutrition, dehydration, untreated medical conditions, dirty living conditions, unkempt appearance.

Violation of Human Rights:

The denial of fundamental rights such as respect for dignity, personal privacy, freedom of thought, belief, opinion, speech, expression and movement; any violation of the Bill of Rights as laid out in the Constitution of South Africa.

Signs to look for: Symptoms of psychological, emotional abuse.

Systemic:

This is any violation of an individual or group of older persons' rights as a result of an action or lack of appropriate action by the State statutory body or private organization.

Signs to look for: Pensions that have been stopped without adequate warning, essential medication not available at day hospitals, clinics, essential information not passed on to older persons, over charging by private providers.

Witchcraft:

Elderly people, especially women, living alone, who are particularly wrinkled or who have darkened skins due to age, or who are suffering from dementia, may be branded as witches by their community and blamed for any disasters e.g. crop failure, storm damage that have occurred in the area. As a result they are ostracized, sometimes physically abused and have even been set alight along with their houses. This happens mainly in rural areas.

Signs to look for: Symptoms of physical, psychological and emotional abuse particularly in a person who is isolated from the community.

¹ None of the signs noted above mean that elder abuse has taken place, but should raise concern and be investigated further. Listen to older persons and take their complaints seriously.

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TO REPORT ELDER ABUSE CALL HEAL (HALT ELDER ABUSE LINE) ON 0800 00 3081
NPO 006-228 PBO 930005361

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