



CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO
OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY

QUICK TIPS: HOW TO PROTECT ELDERS FROM PHYSICAL AND FINANCIAL ABUSE

The prevalence of elder abuse in the United States is a serious problem. In California, it is estimated that 200,000 elders are victims of moderate to severe physical abuse each year. These victims too frequently feel that they are alone or that their cries for help will go unanswered. Often, they do not seek help out of fear of retaliation from their abusers. Many victims remain silent to protect abusive family members from the legal consequences of their crimes, or are too embarrassed to admit that they have fallen victim to predators.

HOW TO IDENTIFY ABUSE

Physical abuse

- Unexplained visible injuries: bruises, scars, welts, broken bones, sprains and dislocations
- Inflicting or threatening to inflict serious pain or injury upon an elder
- Broken belongings such as eyeglasses, canes, and other property
- Marks from restraints, such as abrasions on wrists
- Suspicious caregivers that do not allow a visitor to be alone with the elder

Emotional abuse

- Threats, insults and belittling
- Infliction of mental pain, anguish or distress by verbal or nonverbal acts
- Control of elder's behavior by caregiver
- Elder's behavior mimics dementia: rocking, mumbling or frailness

Sexual abuse

- Bruising around genitals, anus or breasts
- Underclothing that is torn or blood stained
- Unexplained sexually transmitted infections
- Unexplained bleeding from the genitals or anus

Neglect

- Unexplained weight loss or appearance of malnutrition or dehydration
- Untreated medical and physical conditions, including bed sores, injuries, non-renewal of medications or unbathed and unkempt appearance
- Unhealthy living environment: dirt, bugs, soiled bedding and clothes, no heating, no running water or unsafe electrical wiring
- Abandonment or desertion by one responsible for providing care

Financial exploitation

- Large withdrawals from elder's accounts or sporadic changes in finances
- Suspicious changes in wills, power of attorney, titles and policies
- Unauthorized financial activity: addition of names to financial accounts or transactions at an ATM when elder is bedridden

- Any illegal taking, misuse or concealment of funds, property or assets

Healthcare fraud and abuse

- Overmedication or under-medication
- Multiple bills for the same treatment
- Inadequate care despite full charge
- Care facility having poor staffing, under staffing, or overcrowding
- Caregiver provides inadequate responses to questions about care

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO STOP THE ABUSE

Know the signs of abuse and how to report it

If you or someone you know is experiencing abuse, tell someone! If the abuse is immediate, call 911. San Francisco maintains a 24 hour Adult Protective Services hotline that can be reached by calling (415) 557-5230. To report fraud, call the San Francisco Police Department Fraud Detail at (415) 553-1521.

Avoid becoming the victim of Physical Abuse

- **Avoid Walking Alone at Night:** If you have to be outside after dark, ask a friend to accompany you or park your car in a well lit location. If you need to go to the supermarket, for instance, ask a store employee to walk you to your car.
- **Let your neighbors know whenever you see something or someone suspicious,** and ask them to do the same with you. If there is someone you do not know lurking in the neighborhood, communicating with your neighbors may prevent crime. By informing one another of things that seem out of the ordinary you can help each other keep the community safe.

Avoid becoming the victim of Financial Abuse

- **Some individuals or companies will offer to “help” you out of financial distress. But if the offer sounds too good to be true, it probably is.** HUD-approved credit counseling services can counsel you for free on how to avoid foreclosure and how to adjust your housing payments. Do not accept any financial arrangement without running it by a responsible and disinterested third party.
- **Keep Your Personal Information Personal:** Don't give personal identifying information out to any company or person you do not know. Do not accept payment for use of your name, credit card, or social security number. Don't let anyone sign anything for you without written authorization. Make sure you understand the power you give away if you authorize someone to sign for you.