



First Judicial District of Pennsylvania

Elder Justice Resource Center

What Does Elder Abuse Look Like?

Physical Abuse: Causing or threatening physical pain or injury.

Emotional Abuse: Causing or threatening mental pain, anguish, or distress with words or actions.

Sexual Abuse: Unwanted sexual contact of any kind including forcing an elder to witness sexual behaviors.

Financial Exploitation: Improper taking, misuse, or concealment of funds, property, or assets.

Neglect: Refusal or failure by those responsible to provide food, shelter, health care or protection, including abandonment.

Where Can This Happen?

In the home: Elder abuse is often committed by someone the elder trusts: a spouse, a sibling, a child or grandchild, a friend, or caregiver.

In a residential facility: Elder abuse in residential facilities, such as nursing homes and assisted living, may be committed by staff of the facility or can be any of the same group of trusted loved ones.

Anywhere in the community: On a street corner, in a grocery store, at the bank, elder abuse can happen anywhere.



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Why Does Elder Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation Happen?

There are many different factors that contribute to the abuse, neglect, or exploitation of an elder. Often one or more of the following occur and make the abuse more likely:

Cognitive Impairments: Elders who struggle with memory, reasoning, and judgment are at greater risk for abuse, neglect, and exploitation because they may not realize they are being victimized or do not think anyone will believe them.

Intimate Partner Violence: Elder abuse in couples may be intimate partner violence that has been going on for many years. These are partnerships in which one person has traditionally tried to exert power and control over the other through emotional abuse, physical violence and threats, isolations, and other tactics.

Perpetrator Characteristics and Circumstances: Abusers often are dependent on their victims for financial assistance, housing, and other forms of support. The risk of elder abuse increases when the abuser has the opportunity and greater access to the elder's records and personal information. This is especially true when the perpetrators have substance abuse issues, financial problems, or other personal crises.

Isolation: Elders who are living alone are at higher risk because they may not want to or be able to ask for help. But even elders living with others may become isolated when an abusive caregiver cuts them off from other people.

Money and Property: Social security, pension, savings, and property owned by the elderly make them a target for abuse, exploitation, and other financial crimes.