

# ELDER LAW REVIEW

November 2017

## Elder Abuse and Financial Exploitation

Grandma seems to be falling an awful lot at the facility lately. Mom canceled her weekly beautician appointments the last couple of months. Dad gets really quiet when the aid comes in the room. Grandpa seems to be losing weight much faster than usual.

Every state has a law on the books defining terms such as Vulnerable Adult and exploitation. The laws provide penalties for those caught, charged, and convicted of these crimes. However, the very nature of the population involved often times may mean that the crimes go unreported and the offenders go unpunished. What can family members do to protect their loved ones when their loved ones are unable to protect themselves. Knowing the signs of elder abuse and exploitation can assist a family member in knowing when questions should be asked and when to be suspicious.

Physical Abuse: Unexplained bruising, cuts, burns, abrasions, or changes in behavior or mood.

Neglect: Weight loss, hygiene changes, bedsores, lost assistive devices (glasses, dentures, hearing aids)

Psychological or emotional abuse: withdrawing, fear, confusion, depression, hopelessness or other changes that are not caused by an underlying illness or are not consistent with the pattern of progression for a particular illness.

Financial exploitation: unexplainable withdrawals from bank accounts, sudden disappearance of jewelry or other valuables, sudden change in financial behaviors (spending less on things that were normally bought, changes in habits centered around finances), changes in legal documents that cannot be explained.

This list is not exhaustive of the signs of elder abuse and exploitation. Family members should pay attention to changes that don't seem "right".

If you suspect a loved one is being abused or exploited, start by talking to them alone to determine if there is an explanation for what you are seeing. Maybe Mom had an argument with the beautician and hasn't found a new one. If the answers you get don't fit what you are seeing, express your concerns to your loved one's doctor. Maybe the new medication is making Grandpa lose the weight. If you still are not satisfied, then it is time to start asking questions of others and consider calling adult protective services. The main point is, if something doesn't seem right, don't ignore it. Ask questions, let someone know that you are paying attention to what happens with your loved one and report your suspicions to the authorities. In Minnesota, there is a state-wide common entry point for reporting suspected abuse and exploitation. Minnesota Adult Abuse Maltreatment Center has a 24/7 toll-free number for making a report, 844-880-1574

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