

*When visiting
at holiday
time...*



Plan ahead.
Stay connected.
Know the signs.

You can
prevent
elder abuse.

Home for the Holidays

If you're like most Americans, you don't get to see your elderly loved ones as often as you'd like. The holidays offer an opportunity to visit with parents and grandparents. Given that 1 in 10 older Americans are abused and neglected, the National Center on Elder Abuse wants everyone to know what they should be looking for when visiting elderly loved ones to ensure that they are aging with respect and dignity.

For many of us, the holidays offer a once-a-year time to visit with elderly relatives who live at a distance. These holiday visits are a good time to assess what assistance parents or other elderly loved ones might need to safely age in their homes. There are many things to consider. Prepare a checklist of things to look out for and to discuss with your elderly loved one. It might include questions such as:

- Does an elderly loved one require help with chores or housekeeping, bathing, dressing, shopping and meal preparation, managing money, transportation or medications?
- Are they isolated? How often do they socialize with others?
- If living with another, are they dependent on that person for care? Is that person an appropriate caregiver? Does the caregiver understand the medical conditions that the elder has?
- During your visit, keep an eye out for warning signs of self-neglect, or abuse or neglect by others (see below). Remember that most elder abusers are related to the older person.
- If, *before* you make your trip, you suspect that your loved one needs extra assistance, plan a longer stay so that you can visit local aging service organizations, physicians and attorneys during regular work hours.

Make the most of your visits by taking some private time with the elder to discuss future planning. Seniors may not be aware of a gradual decline and may be reluctant or unable to plan for needed care. Support and guidance from family members can help prevent serious accidents and future health complications. Noticing and correcting problems can help keep seniors safely in their homes. *Allow time* for them to express anxieties and needs. You can decide together what needs to be done and who can help.

Some warning signs to look out for:

SELF-NEGLECT

If the senior lives alone and does not have anyone providing assistance, self-neglect may become an issue. Some things to look for include:

- Senior appears confused
- Senior is no longer able to handle meal preparation, bathing, bill paying, etc.
- Senior seems depressed
- Senior is drinking too much or is abusing drugs
- Senior is falling frequently
- Senior appears undernourished, dehydrated, under-medicated, or is not getting care for problems with eyesight, hearing, dental problems, incontinence, etc.

NEGLECT OR ABUSE BY OTHERS

If the senior lives with others or has someone coming in to help, neglect or abuse may become an issue. Some things to look for include:

- Presence of “new best friend” who is willing to care for the senior for little or no cost
- Recent changes in banking or spending patterns
- Older person is isolated from friends and family
- Caregiver has problems with drugs, alcohol, anger and/or emotional instability
- Caregiver is financially dependent on the older person
- Family pet seems neglected or abused
- You find an abundance of mail and/or phone solicitations for money (“You’re a winner!”)
- Senior seems afraid of the caregiver
- Senior has unexplained bruises, cuts, etc.
- Senior has “bed sores” (pressure sores from lying in one place for too long)
- Senior appears dirty, undernourished, dehydrated, over- or under-medicated, or is not receiving needed care for problems with eyesight, hearing, dental issues, incontinence.

What should you do?

- If you suspect your older loved one is at risk and he/she lives in the community, call your local Adult Protective Services or Office on Aging. If the person lives in a licensed facility, call the local Long-term Care Ombudsman. You can find the numbers for your state at www.ncea.aoa.gov.
- Introduce yourself to responsible neighbors and friends. Give them your address and phone numbers in case of an emergency.
- Ask your elderly loved ones directly if they are afraid of anyone, if anyone is taking things without their permission; if anyone is asking them to do things they are not comfortable with, or if anyone is humiliating them. These screening questions may reveal hidden anxieties caused by abuse or neglect.

RESOURCES

National Center on Elder Abuse: www.ncea.aoa.gov

Ageless Alliance: www.agelessalliance.org

Eldercare Locator: www.eldercare.gov

This toll-free service operates Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. (Eastern time) and can be reached at 1-800-677-1116.

AARP: http://assets.aarp.org/external_sites/caregiving/planAhead/long_distance_issues.html

Tips on Long-distance Caregiving.

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