



Elder Abuse:
Tarnishing
the Golden
Years



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Elder abuse is causing harm, or the serious risk of harm, to an elderly person who may not be able to prevent it. The majority of elder abuse happens within families, by people known and trusted by the elderly person. However, there are staggering rates of caregiver abuse in other settings as well, particularly long-term care facilities. Forms of abuse include:

- **Physical abuse:** use of physical force such as through hitting or inappropriate use of restraints
- **Sexual abuse:** inappropriate or non-consensual sexual contact
- **Psychological abuse:** intimidation or humiliation with words or actions, such as locking in a confined space or denying access to phone or family members
- **Neglect:** failure to meet basic needs, such as regular meals and baths, regular position changes, and sanitary living conditions
- **Financial abuse:** unauthorized or inappropriate use of the person's financial or physical property, such as selling property or giving possessions away without the person's knowledge, or forging a name on a deed or bank account
- **Medical abuse:** failure to make medical appointments, interfering with the administration of medications, or over-medicating

The effects of abuse on the elderly may include loss of autonomy and dignity, anxiety, depression, withdrawal from family or social activities, injuries, and worsening medical problems.

Why involve the church? Congregations that minister to elderly persons may observe signs of elder abuse, or an elderly person may confide in a church member an incident of abuse. Scripture instructs us to care for the elderly in our own families and communities (eg: Matt. 15:4-6, 1 Tim. 5:1-8). In addition, the church is called to be salt and light; it has a key role to play in confronting culture in its attitudes toward the elderly, so that all people are treated with dignity and respect.

Provinces and states may have laws governing mandatory reporting of elder abuse. For more information:

In Canada contact the Public Health Agency of Canada www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/seniors-aines/ea-mta-eng.php

In the U.S. contact The National Center on Elder Abuse <http://www.ncea.aoa.gov/>



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Safe Church Ministry, 1700 28th Street SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49508-1407
616-224-0735 | crcna.org/safechurch