

Abuse

Elder Abuse

Elder abuse refers to the mistreatment of an older adult that threatens his or her health or safety. Although the abuse may be caused by a person who is in a position of trust, such as a family member or paid assistant, it also may be self-inflicted. In cases of self-neglect, an older person is unable to provide for his or her own needs (including hygiene, food, and housing) because of emotional, cognitive, or physical impairments. Elder abuse may result in depression, broken bones, sores, bruises, and death. Because persons experiencing elder abuse are often unable to seek help, friends, family, neighbors, or physicians may be in the best position to recognize and respond to an abusive situation.

TYPES OF ELDER ABUSE

- Physical abuse, such as infliction of pain or injury
- Sexual abuse, including any nonconsensual sexual contact
- Emotional abuse, such as yelling or verbal threats
- Caregiver neglect—refusal or failure to fulfill caregiver obligations to meet basic needs, including food, clothing, housing, and medical care
- Self-neglect
- Financial exploitation, such as unauthorized or improper use of a person's fund

RISK FACTORS FOR ELDER ABUSE

An older person who:

- Has memory problems (such as dementia)
- Has physical disabilities
- Has depression, loneliness, or lack of social support
- Abuses alcohol or other substances
- Is verbally or physically combative with the caregiver

A caregiver who:

- Feels overwhelmed or resentful
- Has a history of substance abuse or history of abusing others
- Is dependent on the older person for housing, finances, or other needs

RECOGNITION AND ACTIONS TO TAKE IF YOU SUSPECT ELDER ABUSE

- Intervene if you suspect elder abuse—in Massachusetts call your local Protective Service agency or the statewide Elder Abuse Hotline (1-800-922-2275), which operates on a seven days a week, 24 hours a day basis.

- Listen to elders and their caregivers. Be alert for warning signs such as withdrawal from usual activities, unexplained bruises, or caregiver anger.
- If you are worried that you might become an abusive caregiver, get help from professional and local support groups. Talk to your doctor. Accept help from family and friends.
- Seek counseling or other support if you are feeling stressed or depressed.

Reporting Abuse and Neglect of Individuals with Disabilities

The Disabled Persons Protection Commission (DPPC) is responsible for investigating complaints of abuse against a person with a disability by a caretaker. Mandated and non-mandated reporters report suspected instances of abuse of a person with a disability by filing a verbal report with the DPPC Hotline at 1-800-426-9009 and by submitting a written report to the DPPC.

Based on the person's reported disability, the report is then forwarded to the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) Protective Service Program, the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) Investigation Unit or the Department of Mental Health (DMH) Investigation Unit for the purpose of conducting an investigation and providing services to the abused individual.

Under the authority and oversight of the DPPC and per M.G.L. chapter 19c, the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission Protective Service Program (MRC PSP) conducts civil investigations of allegations of abuse such as acts of physical, sexual, emotional, verbal abuse and omission by a caregiver of a person with a physical disability between the ages of 18 and 59. Protective services are provided to prevent further injury when it is determined that the abused individual was seriously injured as a result of an act and/or omission by the caregiver.

Disabled Persons Protection Hotline 1-800-426-9009
DPPC Disabled Persons Protection Commission, 50 Ross Way, Quincy, MA 02169
Phone: (617) 727-6465 or www.state.ma.us/dppc

Anyone may call the Hotline numbers above. However, certain individuals are "Mandated Reporters", these include any physician, medical intern, hospital personnel engaged in the examination, care or treatment of persons, medical examiner, dentist, psychologist, nurse, chiropractor, podiatrist, osteopath, public or private school teacher,

educational administrator, guidance or family counselor, day care worker, probation officer, social worker, foster parent, police officer or person employed by a state agency within the Executive Office of Health and Human Services as defined by section 16 of chapter 6 A, or employed by a private agency providing services to disabled persons who, in his professional capacity shall have reasonable cause to believe that a person with a disability is suffering from a reportable condition. MGL Chapter 19C: Section 1 Definitions

If you or someone you know is being abused, please call the Disabled Persons Protection Commission hotline at 1-800-426-9009 to file a report 24-hours a day, seven days a week.