

## Watch for Signs of Abuse Toward Older Adults and/or Persons with Disabilities During COVID-19

The safety measures put in place to protect older adults and persons with disabilities from COVID-19, unfortunately, also put them at a greater risk for abuse and exploitation.

Because of the pandemic, adult children may have returned to their parent's home due to job loss which may be causing emotional and financial strain. Older Adults may be living with a spouse or other loved one who suffers from alcohol and/or drug addiction and feel they have no way to escape the situation. An older adult may rely on the care of others to assist them with living in the home. Caregivers are experiencing higher levels of exhaustion and burn out due to lack of formal assistance like adult day services, and in-home care. Some caregivers have opted to stop in home assistance to protect their loved one from COVID-19 and as a result, they are providing around the clock care. Due to the Shelter in Place order, it is hard for an older adult, or caregiver to seek relief or refuge from difficult situations that may be heightened during this crisis.

Now, more than ever, we need to check in on older adults who might be at risk of physical, emotional, and financial abuse.

### What is abuse?

Abuse is a term referring to any negligent act by a caregiver or any other person that causes harm or a serious risk of harm to a vulnerable older adult or an adult (age 18 to 59) with a disability. Abuse can happen to any older adult, by a loved one, a hired caregiver or a stranger. Abuse can happen at home, at a relative's home, or in an eldercare facility.

There are many types of abuse, the most obvious being physical abuse. Abuse can also consist of emotional abuse, sexual abuse, financial abuse, neglect, and abandonment. Illinois law now determines self-neglect as a form of elder abuse as well.

**Self Neglect** is a condition that is the result of person's inability to take care of them self due to physical and/or mental impairments or a diminished capacity that threatens their own health. Essential self-care tasks include providing essential food, clothing, shelter, and health care; and obtaining goods and services necessary to maintain physical health, mental health, emotional well-being, and general safety.

### What are some signs of abuse?

- If the person seems withdrawn from normal activities, depressed, or confused
- If the person is isolated from friends and family (more so than with the current stay at home order)
- If the person has unexplained bruises, burns, broken bones or scars
- If the person appears dirty, underfed, dehydrated, over or under medicated, or not receiving needed care for medical problems
- If the person has bed sores or other preventable conditions
- If the person has experienced recent changes in banking or spending patterns
- If the person has strained or tense relationships, frequent arguments between

## How can abuse be prevented?

Educating older adults, adults with disabilities, professionals, caregivers, and the public on abuse is critical to prevention. On an individual level, use some simple but vital steps to reduce the risk:

- Take care of your health
- Seek professional help for drug, alcohol and depression concerns, and urge family members to get help for these problems
- Attend support groups for spouses and learn about domestic violence services
- Plan for your own future. With a power of attorney or a living will, health care decisions can be addressed to avoid confusion and family problems, should you become incapacitated. Seek independent advice from someone you trust before signing any documents
- Stay active in the community and connected with friends and family. This will decrease social isolation, which has been connected to abuse
- Know your rights. If you engage the services of a paid or family caregiver, you have the right to voice your preferences and concerns
- If you live in a Nursing Home or Assisted Living, call your Long Term Care Ombudsman. The Ombudsman is your advocate and has the power to intervene

## Who do I call if I suspect abuse, neglect or exploitation?

***Call 911 immediately if someone is in immediate, life-threatening danger.***

If the danger is not immediate, but you suspect that abuse has occurred or is occurring, please tell someone. Relay your concerns to the local Adult Protective Services provider agency, Long-Term Care Ombudsman (for nursing homes/assisted living), or police.

## AgeGuide Adult Protective Services Providers

### **DuPage County**

DuPage County Community Services  
(630) 407-6500  
[www.dupageco.org/community](http://www.dupageco.org/community)

### **Grundy & Kankakee Counties**

Catholic Charities Diocese of Joliet  
(815) 932-1921  
[www.catholiccharitiesjoliet.org](http://www.catholiccharitiesjoliet.org)

### **Kane County - North**

Senior Services Associates, Inc.  
(847) 741-0404  
[www.seniorservicesassoc.org](http://www.seniorservicesassoc.org)

### **Kane County - South**

Senior Services Associates, Inc.  
(630) 897-4035  
[www.seniorservicesassoc.org](http://www.seniorservicesassoc.org)

### **Kendall County**

Senior Services Associates, Inc.  
(630) 553-5777  
[www.seniorservicesassoc.org](http://www.seniorservicesassoc.org)

### **Lake County**

Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago  
(847) 546-5733

[www.catholiccharities.net](http://www.catholiccharities.net)

### **McHenry County**

Senior Services Associates, Inc.

(815) 356-7457

[www.seniorservicesassoc.org](http://www.seniorservicesassoc.org)

### **Will County**

Guardian Angel Community Services

(815) 729-0930

[www.gacsprograms.org](http://www.gacsprograms.org)

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To support our community while we shelter in place, AgeGuide will be sharing new resources each week to help older adults and their loved ones stay informed, healthy and connected. AgeGuide has also compiled resources to support older adult and families during COVID-19 on its website which will be updated regularly. To see our resource page, [click here](#).

AgeGuide Northeastern Illinois was established in 1974. Services funded or coordinated by AgeGuide meet the diverse needs of the most rapidly growing population in Illinois. Over 681,000 seniors age 60 and over live in the agency's eight-county service area:

**DuPage, Grundy, Kane, Kankakee, Kendall, Lake, McHenry, and Will Counties**

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