

Faith Communities Respond to Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation of Older Adults



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“Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.”

- Exodus 20:12





Why Faith Leaders Should Learn About Elder Abuse



- You may be the first stop for help
- You may be the only person in the victim's life (except the abuser)
- You will be better prepared to help
- You may create ministries that provide awareness of, and support for victims of, Elder Abuse
- By knowing the warning signs you may save a life

Defining Elder Abuse

How do you define of Elder Abuse?

“Elder abuse is any knowing, intentional, or negligent act by a caregiver or any other person that causes harm or serious risk of harm to a vulnerable older person.”

- *National Center on Elder Abuse*



Types of Elder Abuse



- Neglect – including Self-Neglect
- Physical Abuse
- Sexual Abuse
- Emotional Abuse
- Financial Abuse & Exploitation
- Spiritual Abuse & Neglect



Who Are Victims of Elder Abuse?

- Both men and women are victims of Elder Abuse
- The typical victim is a woman between 70 and 89 who is frail and cognitively impaired
- Victims may be lonely, isolated, and trusting of those who take an interest in them





Aging Women Often Prime Targets

- Some sources indicate that women experience elder abuse more often than men
- What are reasons that make this true?
- Reasons:
 - ✓ There are greater numbers of older women than men since women live longer than men
 - ✓ Women often live alone
 - ✓ Women may be more trusting



Know Signs of Problems



- Unusual degree of fear or submissiveness to caregiver
- Isolation from family, friends, and community
- Home environment concerns
 - ✓ Clutter in house
 - ✓ Foul smells
 - ✓ Withdrawn behavior or disheveled appearance

Know Signs of Problems

- Has repeated “*accidental*” injuries
- Has physical injuries, such as bruises, broken bones, burn marks
- Characterizes a loved one as “*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*”
- Says or hints at being afraid
- Makes veiled disclosures, such as “*My daughter has a temper,*” or “*I have to ask my son’s permission for everything*”



Some **Red** Flags of Abusers



- Potential abusers may have alcohol or substance abuse problems or mental health issues
- Dependent on the older person, unemployed, no personal income
- Verbally abusive to the older adult while charming and friendly to others
- Says things like “*she’s difficult,*” “*he’s just stubborn,*” “*she’s stupid*” or “*he’s always clumsy*” to convince others the older person is *crazy* or incompetent
- Controls the older person’s activities and outside contacts

Reasons Elder Abuse is Often Unreported

- Ageism – some people have an unfavorable attitude towards older adults
- Lack of knowledge: not knowing the signs of abuse and/or reporting procedures
- Disbelief





Reasons Elder Abuse is Often Unreported

- Fear of abandonment
- Fear of retaliation or punishment
- Fear of jeopardizing relationship
- Family loyalty
- Shame and embarrassment
- Fear of being placed in an institution
- Don't know how or to whom to report abuse





Churches can help Reduce Abuse By Family Members



- Set-up endowment or emergency funds – providing financial aid for caregivers and specific needs of older adults
- Enlist and train Friendly Visitors or *Stephen Ministers* for visitation and support
- Provide Respite Care at church – at low or no cost
- Can you suggest other ideas?



Churches can help Reduce Abuse by Unrelated Caregivers

- Start a Community Faith Nursing Ministry (*Parish Nurse*)
- Develop network of professionals: social workers, attorneys, counselors
- Develop a library of forms – standard for your state
- Can you identify other ways?





Churches can help Reduce Abuse by Service Providers



- Have a church sponsored Service Team of volunteers for helping around the home
- Have volunteers who can simply be present when providers are in the older adult's home
- Have a list of “Preferred Providers”
- Do you have other suggestions?



Growing Problem of Financial Exploitation

- More people are living longer today therefore there are more older adults
- Older adults have the greatest proportion of the money and therefore are the obvious target for predators
- Diminished cognitive abilities create greater vulnerabilities
- More older adults live alone
- More older adults using the internet for shopping and convenience



Who Are Financial Abusers?



- Family Members
- Unrelated Caregivers
- Service Providers:
 - ✓ Legal Services
 - ✓ Home and Car Repair
 - ✓ Financial Services
- Predatory Lending & “*Great Rich Quick*” Schemes
- Life & Health Insurance Scams
- Magazine Solicitations & Internet Scams
- Questionable Religious & Charitable Solicitations

What Can Faith Leaders Do?

- Learn the signs of elder abuse
- Create a safe place for older adults by making your church a place where elderly victims can come forward for help and safety
- Educate the congregation on the subject of violence and fraud and abuse of elders



What Can Faith Leaders Do?



- Break the silence about abuse:
Give a sermon on elder abuse
- Include fraud & scam alerts
in your church newsletter
- Intervene: Do not turn away
from clues of abuse
- What else can church leaders do?



If Someone Tells You About Abuse

- Do not act shocked - Stay calm - Put safety of victim first
- **Call:** Toll Free 1-888-APS-TENN (1-888-277-8366)
- Or, report suspected abuse **online** at the secure site: <https://reportadultabuse.dhs.tn.gov/>
- If life is in danger, call the police or dial 911
- For more information about Elder Abuse, visit the National Center on Elder Abuse at www.ncea.acl.gov





Faith Communities

- More than any other age group, older adults are actively involved in or contacted regularly by religious congregations
- Clergy and other faith leaders from congregations are among the few, and in many cases the only, people who visit an elderly person's home or care facility



Faith Communities



- As a member of a faith community, whether lay or clergy, you may be in a unique position to observe signs of abuse and neglect by family, paid caregivers, & businesses
- Protecting the elderly and other vulnerable adults from further loss or pain is a moral and ethical response as well as a faith duty



Faith Communities Can Make a Difference

- Reframe aging in your church
- Confront ageism present in your congregation
- Recognize that ageism causes churches to neglect the spiritual and emotional needs of older adults
- Develop intentional ministry by, with, and for older adults
- Join forces with other churches and/or social service organizations





Faith Communities Can Make a Difference

By providing any of the following ministries:

- Adult Day Center Ministry
- Caregivers Support Group
- Children of Aging Parents Support Group
- Frauds and Scams Awareness
- Home Repair and Minor Home Maintenance
- Homebound Lunch Partners
- Marriage Enrichment Retreat





Faith Communities Can Make a Difference

By providing any of the following ministries:

- Respite Care Ministry
- Service Provider “Preferred List”
- Technology Training (e.g., Smart Phones, iPads, laptop computers, internet usage)
- Telephone Reassurance Ministry
- Transportation Ministry
- Visitation Ministry
- Widow/Widower Support Group





Faith Communities Can Make a Difference



- Plan for settings that don't allow for isolation of individuals
- Assign pairs or teams of volunteers to deliver meals or perform chores
- Have pairs/teams on duty in Adult Day or Respite Care ministries
- Conduct CPR & First Aid training for all volunteers and staff
- Require background checks and thorough screening for all volunteers and staff

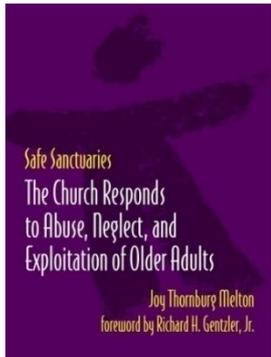


Recognize World Elder Abuse Awareness on June 15

- **World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD)** was launched on June 15, 2006 by the International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse and the World Health Organization at the United Nations
- The purpose of WEAAD is to promote a better understanding of abuse and neglect of older persons by raising awareness of the cultural, social, economic and demographic processes affecting elder abuse and neglect



Selected Resources



***The Church Responds to Abuse, Neglect,
and Exploitation of Older Adults***
By Joy Thornburg Melton
Discipleship Resources/Upper Room Books

NPT's Aging Matters Series:
Abuse & Exploitation
WNPT.org





ENCORE Ministry Purpose

To provide consultation, training and support, advocacy, resources, networking opportunities, and grant funding to equip church leaders of the Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference of The United Methodist Church for intentional ministry by, with, and for older adults





ENCORE Ministry Provides

- ENCORE Ministry has a Board of Directors that oversees the work of the ministry
- Website: www.encoreministry.org
- Monthly newsletter: *ENCORE Ministry Connection*
- Staff:
 - Kent McNish, Executive Director
 - Cindy Solomon, Director of Communications
 - Rev. Dr. Richard Gentzler, Director of Ministry
- For free newsletter subscription, email csolomon@encoreministry.org

