



NEEDHAM PUBLIC HEALTH DIVISION



Elder Abuse

Definitions:

REACH Definition of domestic violence: a pattern of behaviors that one person uses to gain and maintain power and control over another person.

CDC Definition of elder abuse: an intentional act or failure to act that causes or creates a risk of harm to an adult age 60 or older. The abuse occurs at the hands of a caregiver or a person the elder trusts.

Massachusetts Law definition of elder abuse (MGL Ch. 19A, Sec. 14-26): acts or omissions resulting in serious physical, sexual, or emotional injury or financial loss to an adult 60 or older.

Statistics:

According to the National Council on Aging, 1 in 10 people over the age of 60 have experienced a form of elder abuse and only 1 in 24 cases of elder abuse is reported.

Types & Signs of Abuse:

Physical (anything that can make someone feel physically unsafe)

- Bruises, burns, broken bones

Sexual

- Sexually transmitted diseases present, trauma to genitals / mouth / breast/ rectum, change in relationship with another individual, signs restraint was used (bruises/ burns).

Financial

- Changes in finances, unpaid bills, missing financial records and documentation, forged signatures.

Emotional

- Behavioral changes: sudden withdrawal, change in alertness and mood, heightened anxiety, being argumentative.

Signs of Neglect

- Malnourishment
- Poor hygiene
- Untreated injuries or illnesses
- Dirty / cluttered / dangerous home environment
- Lack of heat, running water, electricity
- Bedsores
- Lack of medications or medical care

Common Barriers for reporting

- Internalized shame
 - Feeling like a burden
 - Expressing guilt
- Abuse is normalized – cycle of abuse
 - Not knowing what domestic abuse means
 - Lack of resources or knowledge there of
- Personal values
 - Negative outlook on divorce
 - Family problems are personal problems
 - Gender roles and norms
- Fear of legal system and getting people in trouble
- Isolated
 - No contact to people other than abuser
 - No access to finances
- Familial Abuse
 - Don't want loved one to get in trouble
 - Feeling as if they failed as a parent or spouse
 - Want to help abuser rather than report

Caregiver stress

(feeling stressed due to the physical and emotional strain that care givers experience with their jobs)

- The care giver stress model explains that because of the extreme stress care givers experience, care givers have episodes of abuse.
 - Care giver stress model neglects the power and control taken over from the survivor. Research shows that the relationship between elder survivors and their care giver is more typical domestic abuse model.
 - Research shows that stress is not the cause of abusive behavior.

Local Elder Abuse resources

- MA Elder abuse hotline 24/7 # 800-922-2275
- MA local elder services agent (M-F, 9-5) # 800-243-4636
- MA online reporting: <https://hssmaprod.wellsky.com/intake>
- Springwell (offers many services to elders including home delivered meals, in home service, medical escort etc.)
 - Phone: 617-926-4100
 - Email: info@springwell.com
 - Website: <https://springwell.com>