

Catholic Mutual...CARES for Kids

Protecting Vulnerable Adults

Abuse of vulnerable adults is a pervasive issue that often goes unnoticed or unreported. It can have devastating consequences for individuals and their families, leading to physical and emotional harm, financial loss, and a loss of trust in caregivers and institutions. It is important to raise awareness regarding vulnerable adult abuse and how individuals and communities can work together to prevent it.

Who Are Vulnerable Adults?

A vulnerable adult is an individual aged 18 and over who may need assistance due to a disability, age, or illness. This group of individuals has a higher risk of abuse due to not being able to defend themselves or being tricked into a misuse of their assets.

Types of Abuse

Forms of adult abuse are physical, emotional, sexual, financial exploitation, and neglect. The few studies that have been conducted on abuse in institutions show a wide range of results, with financial exploitation being the most reported and physical abuse most likely to occur with another type of abuse. For each report of abuse, there are an estimated twenty-four other cases that do not get reported.

Types of Abuse	Signs of Abuse
<i>Physical</i>	Includes bruises, welts, lacerations, bone fractures, open wounds, or cuts.
<i>Sexual</i>	Often includes unexplained venereal disease/infections or vaginal/anal bleeding, and bruises around the breasts/genital area.
<i>Emotional</i>	Seen through an emotional withdrawal, unusual behavior, or a lack of responsiveness/communication.
<i>Neglect</i>	Indicated by dehydration, malnutrition, untreated bed sores, poor hygiene, and hazardous/unsanitary living conditions.
<i>Financial Exploitation</i>	Can be noticed by sudden changes in bank accounts/banking practices, the inclusion of additional names on the victim's bank signature card, unauthorized withdrawals of funds, unexplained disappearance of valuables and/or other possessions, or bills going unpaid despite the availability of funds.

The table above shows the types of abuse along with their common signs.

Appropriate Behaviors with Vulnerable Adults

When you are working with any vulnerable adult, whether they are adults with disabilities or the elderly, there are several actions you can take to make sure that your behavior is respectful of the dignity of the person you are serving. Have a realistic picture of just how common abuse is. Understand that abusers are often family members, friends, neighbors, or acquaintances. Having community networks and social support can help to protect vulnerable adults. Knowing how to recognize the signs of abuse may not prevent the abuse itself, but can help put a stop to it.

Raising awareness about vulnerable adult abuse is essential to protect the most vulnerable members of our society. By understanding the signs of abuse, recognizing the impact of abuse, and taking action to prevent abuse, we can create a safer and more compassionate community for all. Together, we can make a difference in the lives of vulnerable adults and ensure that they are treated with dignity and respect.

References

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