

# Abuse

## Types of Abuse

### **The healthcare environment and abuse**

To abuse means to damage, injure, or use wrongly. It is not always easy to determine if someone seeking medical help is a victim of abuse. For example:

- An infant who has not learned to talk is unable to provide necessary information.
- A victim may deny abuse because of fear of exposing the caregiver or partner.
- A non-victim may claim abuse when it isn't true.

Workers are better able to recognize the signs and correctly identify abuse when they know the facts. The following facts are important to know:

- All types of abuse are found in all social and economic groups.
- Types of abuse include child abuse, domestic violence (sometimes known as "spouse abuse"), and elder abuse.
- People can report abuse without identifying themselves.

Any health care worker who determines abuse has occurred or suspects it is responsible for reporting the situation.

### **Reporting child abuse**

Child abuse is an act that results in death, physical or emotional injury, sexual abuse, or exploitation of a child. Child abuse occurs most often in children aged 0-3 years. The most common child abuse situations involve neglect or physical abuse by the female parent.

The four types of child abuse are:

1. Physical abuse
2. Neglect
3. Sexual abuse
4. Emotional abuse

Some facts about child abuse:

- 9 of every 10 victims are abused by one parent.
- At least 1 of every 3 victims suffers from more than one type of child abuse.
- About 1% of all children have been abused or are at risk of being abused.
- The highest cause of death in child abuse cases is due to neglect.

Health care professionals are **MANDATED REPORTERS** of child abuse. This means that any health care professional who suspects child abuse **must** report the case to the state hotline number.

### **Reporting domestic violence**

Domestic violence is behavior that may include physical, sexual, economic, emotional and psychological abuse of one family member or partner by another. Because the abuse is often between intimate partners, it is also sometimes called "spouse abuse."

Examples of domestic violence include stalking (surveillance or telephone harassment, for example) and battery (threatened or actual physical violence).

Some facts about domestic violence:

## Cross Country University's Caregiver Safety Series

- There are about 4 million cases annually.
- 95% of reported cases involve a male batterer and female victim
- While intimate partners commit 22% of the violence against women, intimate partners commit only 3% of the violence against men.
- 50% of female victims of domestic violence report a physical injury. About 40% of these victims seek professional medical treatment.
- 30% of female murder victims are killed by their intimate partner.

Health care professionals may or may not be mandated by law to report domestic violence to state agencies or to law enforcement. In some jurisdictions it may not be mandatory unless the situation involves serious injury or a weapon. Victims of domestic violence are considered to be competent adults, capable of taking action for themselves. In general, all injuries due to weapons must be reported to the law enforcement agency.

The role of the healthcare professional is to:

- Report the injury if it is caused by a weapon.
- Document all findings.
- Encourage the victim to seek help with his or her domestic situation.
- Educate the victim about abuse and options for help.

### **Reporting abuse of the elderly**

Each year elderly persons in domestic settings are abused, neglected, and exploited by family members and others. Many victims are people who are frail, vulnerable, cannot help themselves, and depend on others to meet their needs. Self-neglect is a form of abuse that occurs with the elderly.

Some facts about abuse of the elderly:

- The incidence of elder abuse in domestic settings increases annually.
- For every reported case, 5 cases go unreported.
- Females are more likely to be abused than males (after accounting for the larger proportion of females in an aging population).
- Elders over 80 are 2-3 times more likely to be abused than elders between 65 and 80.
- In 9 out of 10 cases in which the abuser is known to the abused elder, the abuser is a family member, such as an adult child or an adult child's spouse.

Health care professionals are MANDATED REPORTERS of abuse of the elderly in almost all states. Actual rules will vary from state to state.

## Child Abuse

### **What is child abuse?**

The federal Child Abuse and Prevention Treatment Act (CAPTA) defines child abuse and neglect as: at a minimum, any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker, which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation, or an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm.

A **child** is someone who is less than 18 years old, or (except in the case of sexual abuse) the age defined by the Child Protection Act of the state in which the child resides.

Some recent national statistics on child abuse and neglect:

## Cross Country University's Caregiver Safety Series

- More than 1% of all children (11.8 out of every 1000) were abused or were at risk of being abused.
- 3 out of 5 children who were abused suffered from neglect
- More than 1 out of 3 children who were abused suffered from more than one type of abuse.
- 9 out of 10 children who were abused were abused by one parent.
- Neglect or physical abuse was most commonly inflicted by the female parent.
- Sexual abuse was most commonly inflicted by the male parent.
- There were 1100 child deaths as a result of child abuse.

### **Potential abusers and high-risk children**

Parents and caregivers who are most likely to abuse a child are those who:

- Are single parents with very little outside help
- Have a problem with substance abuse
- Live in poverty
- Have high stress and limited resources to help in high stress times
- Have witnessed violence or were the victims of violence and abuse as children
- Have inadequate parenting skills and unrealistic expectations of a child.

Children who are at higher risk of abuse are:

- Mentally challenged children
- Premature infants
- Colicky babies/babies who cry a lot
- Children 0 - 3 years old
- Children with chronic medical problems
- Children with behavioral problems
- Children who live in a home where there is spouse abuse.

### **Four types of child abuse**

Four types of child abuse are:

1. Physical abuse
2. Neglect
3. Sexual abuse
4. Emotional abuse.

#### Physical abuse

Physical abuse is an action such as kicking, punching, hitting, biting, burning, shaking or other action that causes physical harm to a child, even if the harm is not intentional, as in over-punishment.

#### Neglect

Neglect is the failure to provide for the child's basic physical, educational, or emotional needs. Allowances must be made for cultural values, poverty, and other factors that might be part of the reason for neglect. For example, people living in poverty may not be able to afford the medication the child needs.

#### Physical Neglect

Physical neglect includes abandonment, the failure to provide food, not allowing a runaway to come home, inadequate supervision so that the child is endangered, and withholding medical treatment or other life-sustaining treatments including water and nutrition, when the treatment would most likely result in correction of a medical condition.

NOTE: This does not include cases where there is no chance of recovery from illness, such as in a child with terminal cancer or a newborn with a condition that is incompatible with life.

## Cross Country University's Caregiver Safety Series

### Emotional Neglect

Emotional neglect includes not responding to the emotional needs of a child, exposing a child to domestic violence, allowing a child to use drugs and/or alcohol, and the failure to provide the necessary psychological care.

### Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse is inappropriate sexual behavior with a child. It includes fondling a child's genitals, making the child fondle the adult's genitals, intercourse, incest, rape, and sexual exploitation. To be considered child abuse, these acts have to be committed by a person responsible for the care of a child (such as a parent, baby-sitter, or daycare provider) or related to the child. If a stranger commits these acts, it would be considered sexual assault and handled solely by the police and criminal courts.

### Emotional/psychological abuse

Emotional abuse is an act, by parents or caregivers, which could cause behavioral, cognitive (affecting the thinking process), emotional, or mental disorders. Examples of this type of abuse include bizarre forms of punishment such as locking a child in a dark closet, basement, or attic. Emotional abuse is generally present with most other forms of abuse and is often hard to prove.

### **Signs of child abuse**

Child abuse is often hard to recognize unless it is very obvious. Knowing the signs and symptoms of the different types of abuse will help you recognize possible cases.

Signs of physical abuse include:

- Injuries inconsistent with the explanation of the injury (examples include an infant who is not yet walking or crawling with a broken leg, or injuries on both sides of the body because of a fall - injuries due to a fall are usually found on one side only)
- Injuries in several stages of healing such as old bruises and new bruises
- Evidence of old fractures
- Injuries such as rope burns, scalding, and cigarette burns.

Signs of neglect include:

- Malnutrition
- Failure to keep medical appointments or prescribed treatment
- Child not dressed for the weather
- Child not taking medicine as prescribed.

Factors such as poverty may appear as neglect.

Signs of sexual abuse include:

- Provocative behavior or knowledge of sexual matters inconsistent with child's age
- Suicidal gestures
- Behavior problems
- Diagnosis of sexually transmitted disease in a child.

Signs of emotional/psychological abuse include:

- Poor development of basic skills
- Anxiety or insecurity
- Withdrawal

## Cross Country University's Caregiver Safety Series

- Destructive behavior
- Aggression or angry outbursts.

### **Reporting child abuse**

In all states, the health professional is a MANDATED REPORTER for suspected cases of child abuse. Individual facilities may have their own policies about who files the actual report.

Each state has its own statutes defining:

- The procedure for reporting suspected cases of child abuse
- Who must file the report
- Other factors such as criminal punishment for abuse.

If abuse is suspected or if a child tells you he or she was abused:

- Notify the appropriate State agency (your facility will have a hotline number to call) and they will get the details from the child.
- DO NOT interview the child. Studies show that the testimony of children is less accurate when they are asked to repeat it.
- DO NOT allow the child to leave with the caregiver until the state agency is contacted and you have their permission to allow the child to leave with the parent/caregiver.

## Elder Abuse

### **What is elder abuse?**

**Elder abuse** is the physical, emotional, or financial mistreatment, neglect or exploitation of a person 60 years of age or older by another person or the self-neglect of an individual in this age range.

There are three situations in which elder abuse occurs:

1. Domestic elder abuse
2. Institutional elder abuse
3. Self-neglect or self-abuse

### Domestic elder abuse

Domestic elder abuse is abuse of an older person by someone who has a special relationship with the elder such as a spouse, sibling, child, friend, or caregiver. The abuse occurs in the older person's home or in the home of the caregiver.

### Institutional elder abuse

Institutional elder abuse is abuse of an older person that occurs in a residential facility for older persons such as a nursing home, foster home, group home, or boarding house. In institutions, the persons who are the abusers have been hired to provide care and protection for elders.

### Self-neglect

Self-neglect (also known as self-abuse) is the behavior of an elderly person that threatens his or her own health or safety. It occurs when the older person refuses or fails to provide himself/herself with enough food or water, clothing, shelter, safety, personal hygiene and/or medication. Self-neglect usually occurs when an elder lives alone.

### Statistics on elder abuse:

## Cross Country University's Caregiver Safety Series

- In 1996, 500,000 elder persons in domestic settings were abused or neglected (including self-neglect).
- It is estimated that for every case that is reported, 5 are unreported.
- Even after accounting for the larger proportion of women in an aging population, females are abused more often than men.
- Those over 80 are abused at a rate 2-3 times higher than elders between the ages of 60 and 80.
- In over 90% of cases where the abused elder knows the abuser, the abuser is a family member. Two thirds of these abusers are the children of the elder or the children's spouses.

### **Commonalities in elder abuse**

More than two-thirds of the people who abuse elders are family members who are responsible for the care of the victims. There are many different reasons for elder abuse but no single major cause. Each case is different and has different contributing factors.

Common factors that lead to elder abuse include:

- Caretaker stress
- Impairment of dependent elder
- Personal problems of caretakers
- Cycle of violence.

### Caretaker stress

Caring for a frail, elderly person can be extremely stressful, especially if the patient is confused and/or has physical problems. If the caretaker does not have help, it can be very exhausting and frustrating.

### Impairment of dependent elder

Research shows the incidence of abuse is more frequent among elders with impairments. As impairments such as physical or mental disabilities get worse, the abuse tends to be more common.

### Personal problems of abusers

Adult children who abuse elderly parents often suffer from mental and emotional disorders, alcoholism, drug addiction, and/or financial problems. These children are dependent on their parents for support and are abusive when their parents become infirm and unable to provide the support they previously supplied.

### Cycle of violence

The cycle of violence is a pattern of abuse that has three phases:

1. Tension rises.
2. Abuse (often violence) occurs.
3. The abuser apologizes, promises to change, and volunteers to go for help.

The cycle repeats over and over becoming more severe each time. Children who grow up in this situation become abusers because this is the only way they know to respond to tension. The behavior can continue from one generation to another.

### **Types of elder abuse**

The four types of elder abuse are:

- Physical abuse
- Psychological abuse
- Financial or material exploitation

## Cross Country University's Caregiver Safety Series

- Neglect or abandonment

### Physical abuse

Physical abuse is intentional physical pain or injury inflicted on an elder by the person who is responsible for his or her care. Examples include slapping, bruising, sexual assault, use of unreasonable physical restraint, deprivation of food or water, and over- or under-medicating.

### Psychological abuse

Psychological abuse is the infliction of mental or emotional suffering by a person who is in a position of trust with an elder. Examples include verbal assault, humiliation, intimidation, threats, and isolation from the family and/or friends.

### Financial or material exploitation

Financial or material exploitation is the theft or improper use of the elder's money or property, without his or her consent, for someone else's benefit. Examples include forcing or tricking the elder into selling his or her home, forging a signature on pension cheques or wills, misusing "power of attorney," and not allowing the older person to buy needed clothes.

### Neglect or abandonment

Neglect is the failure of a caretaker to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, psychological care, physical care, medical care or supervision to avoid physical harm, mental anguish or mental illness to the elder. Examples include: failure to assist with personal hygiene or the provision of clothes, and failure to protect an elder from health and safety hazards.

### **Signs of elder abuse**

Signs of physical abuse include:

- Elder's report of being hurt
- Injury inconsistent with the story of how it was received
- Injuries in various stages of healing
- Observed actions of caretaker, such as hitting, slapping, or burning
- Caretaker's refusal to allow anyone to see an elder alone

Signs of sexual abuse (a type of physical abuse) include:

- Elder's report of being sexually abused
- Torn, stained or bloody underclothing
- Bruises or other injuries around breasts or genitals
- Unexplained vaginal or rectal bleeding
- Unexplained sexually transmitted disease (STDs) such as gonorrhea or syphilis

Signs of psychological abuse include:

- Elder report of psychological abuse
- Elder being very agitated and upset
- Elder being withdrawn and uncommunicative
- Unusual behavior often attributed to dementia (hitting/biting)

Signs of financial or material exploitation include:

- Using the elder's ATM without permission
- Taking over a bank account without permission
- Forgery of an elder's signature on financial documents
- Making changes to the will without approval
- Providing substandard care despite an elder's ability to pay

Signs of abandonment, neglect, or self-neglect include:

## Cross Country University's Caregiver Safety Series

- Malnutrition
- Untreated bedsores
- Untreated health problems
- Unsafe living conditions
- Unsanitary appearance such as dirty clothes
- Desertion in clinical facility, shopping mall or other public location

### **Reporting elder abuse**

As a health professional, in any state, you are a MANDATED REPORTER of suspected cases of elder abuse. Your facility may direct the procedure for reporting. All calls are confidential and must be made to the state hotline. The investigation will be carried out by the state Adult Protective Services.

If abuse is suspected or an elder tells you he or she was abused:

- Document all findings, including any statements the victim and caretaker make
- Do not allow the elder to leave without permission from the state Adult Protective Services

Your community should also have an Area Agency on Aging that provides services for the elderly. If a caretaker expresses any concerns or clearly needs help, you can call, or refer them to, this agency.

## Spouse Abuse

### **What is spouse abuse?**

Spouse abuse, also known as domestic violence, is a pattern of threatening or violent behavior used to establish power and control over an intimate partner. It involves emotional, financial, physical, sexual, and social abuse of a person. Spouse abuse happens in all types of intimate relationships: between married couples, between unmarried couples, between homosexual couples, and between couples living together or apart. People of different race, income, and education are potential abusers or victims of spouse abuse. In a relationship where spouse abuse prevails, one person is forced to change their behavior because of abuse or the perceived threat of abuse.

Facts about spouse abuse:

- There are about 4 million cases annually.
- 30 % of female murder victims are killed by intimate partners.
- 95% of reported cases of spouse abuse involve violence against women.
- 50% of female victims of spouse abuse report a physical injury. About 40% of those victims seek professional medical treatment.
- 75% of severe abuse occurs after the victim has left the abuser.
- 1 in 4 women will experience violence in their lifetime.

### **Power and control**

Spouse abuse or domestic violence is the result of one person's need for power and control over another and the belief that he or she has the right to gain the power and control in whatever way possible. Husband abuse does exist but represents only 5% of spouse abuse cases, so most examples and illustrations in this module will refer to wife abuse.

The abuser seeks to exert power or gain control over the victim in a variety of ways. Ways to exert power and gain control are through:



## Cross Country University's Caregiver Safety Series

- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Social abuse
- Financial abuse
- Emotional abuse.

### Physical abuse

Physical abuse is the infliction of pain or physical injury by the victim's partner. A physical abuser may hit, push, kick, slap, hold down, or throw things at the victim, and may also harm a victim's children, pets, or property, or commit battery (a threat of violence accompanied by the ability to carry out the threat).

### Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse is violence by the victim's partner in which sex is used to hurt, degrade, dominate, humiliate, or gain power over the victim. It is an act of aggression. Victims of sexual abuse have a pronounced inability to trust, which leads to secrecy and non-disclosure. The abuse may involve force, coercion, bribes, threats, or corruption, and may include prostitution or money. A victim of sexual abuse may be treated as a sex object, called sexual names, or forced into sexual activities by the abuser, who may brag or boast to the victim about sexual activities with another person, or compare the victim's sex actions to those of other persons.

### Social Abuse

Social abuse of a spouse is the isolation, restraint, or other behaviors that prevent or limit a partner from interacting with others. Social abuse is also about power and control and is aimed at limiting the victim's interactions with family, friends, coworkers, and others. A social abuser may make jokes and insults about the victim, may prevent the victim from working or from seeing friends, or may drive friends away, and may deny the victim's social values or isolate the victim by moving to another location.

### Financial abuse

Financial abuse of a spouse is the misuse or exertion of control over money, access to money, or possessions. It includes stealing and lying about money. A financial abuser may remove large sums of money from the victim's bank account, deny the victim the ability to pay bills or buy necessities, deprive the victim of money or access to money, or deny the victim job freedom.

### Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse is behavior that causes feelings of unworthiness. It can interfere with the positive development of another. Emotional abuse is almost always present in situations where other forms of spouse abuse occur. It is cruel and destructive. Victims of emotional abuse may be put down by their partner, told no-one else will want them if the partner leaves, and ignored or isolated. An emotional abuser may withhold affection from the victim, or use jealousy, passion, or anger to justify actions.

### **Spouse abusers and why their victims stay**

Individuals at risk of becoming abusers include:

- Victims of child abuse
- Adult children from a family with a history of domestic violence
- Those who have learned that physical force is the way to solve problems
- People with low self-esteem and low self-control
- Individuals who suffer from substance abuse, alcoholism, and drug addiction
- Individuals with a rigid stereotype of gender roles who feel the need to be "in control"
- Those who do not have the communication skills to handle emotions in non-violent ways

## Cross Country University's Caregiver Safety Series

- People who live in a society that believes domestic violence is a private matter so that acts of violence go unpunished.

Victims stay in abusive relationships because of:

- Economic constraints
- Fear of severe abuse if they leave the abuser
- Feelings of guilt, shame, and failure
- Failure to recognize that the actions are actually abuse (the victim feels that she or he deserves the abuse)
- Social isolation and lack of support for victims and their children
- Promises of change from the abuser
- Prior lack of intervention or help
- Threats of violence.

### **The cycle of spouse abuse**

The cycle of abuse is common in many cases of spouse abuse. It results in the battered person living in a state of fear with the belief that there is no escape. The three phases of the cycle are:

1. Tension-building phase
2. Crisis phase
3. Honeymoon phase.

#### Phase 1: Tension-building phase

The tension-building phase is characterized by stress. The abuser shows signs of increasing irritation with the victim, often finding fault with everything she does, and the victim becomes fearful and tries to find ways to appease the abuser.

#### Phase 2: Crisis phase

The crisis phase is characterized by violence. The abuser's anger reaches a critical point and is released in the form of verbal or physical violence. The abuser may shout and scream at the victim, threaten her, and damage the victim's property. Physical assaults such as punching, kicking, or slapping hard enough to bruise, break bones, and draw blood may also occur. The police or neighbors may be called, or the violence may be unknown to people outside. The victim may be made to feel she provoked the escalation from phase 1 to phase 2.

#### Phase 3: Honeymoon phase

The honeymoon phase is characterized by a return to calmer behavior. The abuser is sorry, promises to get help and never do this again, and may offer affection to the victim.

### **The healthcare worker and spouse abuse**

Victims of spouse abuse often have obvious physical injuries. Others may have vague complaints and deny abuse.

When a patient denies spouse abuse, the following signs may alert health care workers to suspect abuse:

- A pattern of missed appointments
- Delays in seeking treatment
- Frequent medical visits for vague complaints with lack of evidence of physical causes
- Injuries in several stages of healing such as old bruises and new bruises, and evidence of old fractures
- Injuries during pregnancy (because pregnancy is a high risk situation for abuse)
- Injuries inconsistent with the explanation of the injury.

## Cross Country University's Caregiver Safety Series

Examples of situations in which the injuries are inconsistent with the explanation of the injuries:

- Someone states that the injuries are caused by a fall, and yet the bruises and cuts, on the hands and arms, are consistent with self-defense injuries.
- Someone states that the injuries are caused by a fall, and yet the injuries are found on both sides of the body (usually, in a fall, injuries are on one side only).

When abuse is suspected:

- Provide privacy and the opportunity for the patient to talk. Privacy also means privacy from partner, family members, or acquaintances.
- Assure the patient of confidentiality.
- Be non-judgmental and caring.
- Ask if the partner has ever harmed or threatened to harm the patient or his or her children.
- Let patient know that there are options. Reinforce the idea that victims do not cause nor deserve the abuse.
- DO NOT ask a patient why he or she does not leave the abuser.
- DO NOT change your course of action because a patient does not admit to abuse.

Healthcare workers' responsibilities include:

- Screening all patients for signs of abuse
- Documenting all findings including the victim's statements
- Ensuring domestic violence information is available in waiting areas and rest rooms
- Knowing the options and inform the patient of options.
- Making referrals, as indicated.

Options for victims include:

- Pressing charges to have the abuser arrested
- Obtaining an injunction or restraining order against abuser (the purpose of the restraining order is to prevent the abuser from communicating or associating with the victim)
- Going to a safe house or women's shelter for protection and accommodations
- Going back home.
- Getting help when ready.

BE CAUTIOUS about giving the victim a phone number to call for help. The abuser may find it and respond abusively. Instead, help the victim memorize the number, tell her how to find the numbers for help, or tell her the names of organizations she can look up in the phone book when it is safe.

If the abuser seeks help, follow the hospital policy on spouse abuse and refer him or her to treatment centers for help. There is also help for substance abuse.

### End of Abuse Lesson