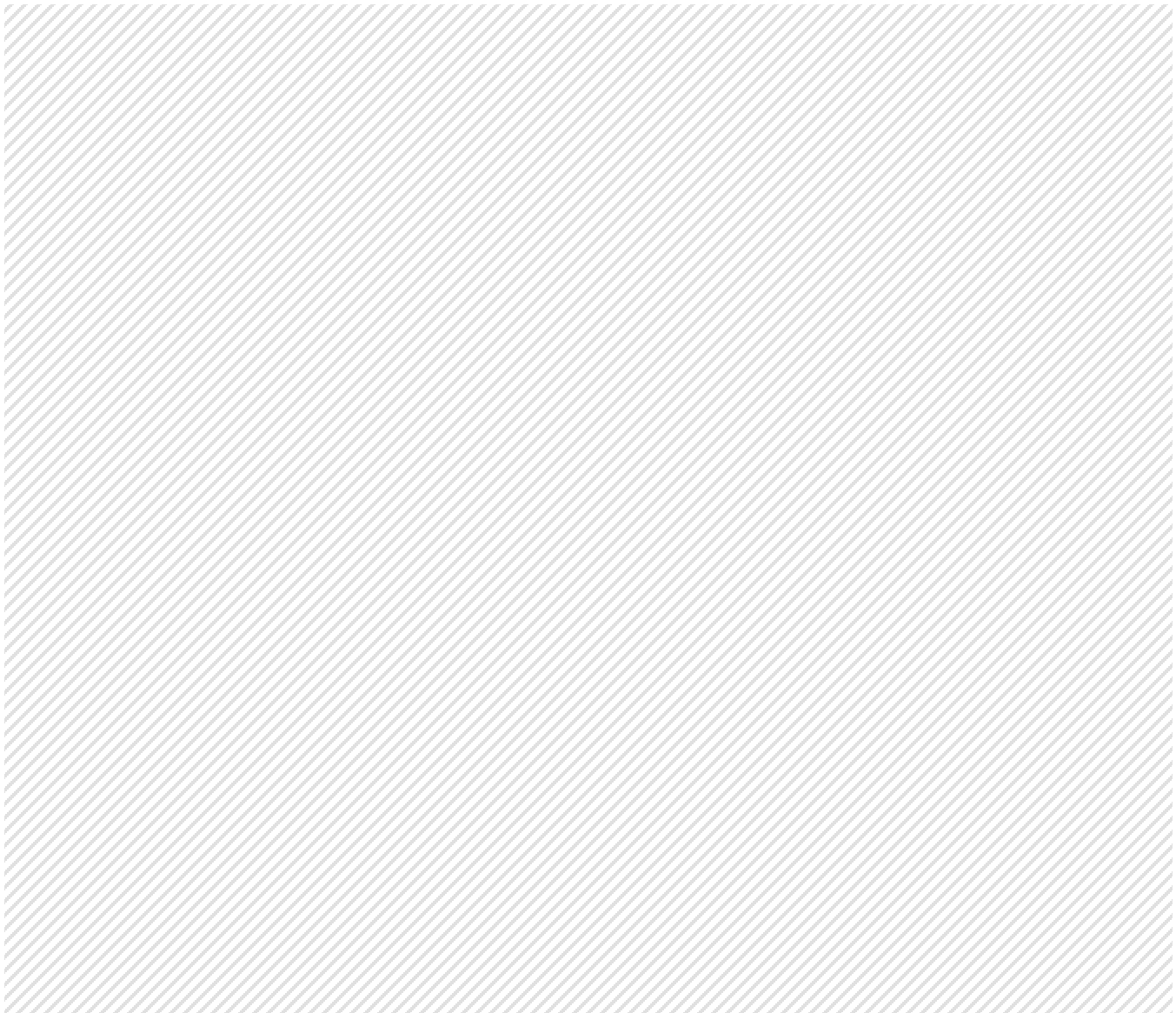


# Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation (Child, Domestic, Elder)

## Core Competency Inservice

January 2020

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## Introduction

Anyone, regardless of age or sex can be a victim of abuse, neglect, and/or assault, but people most vulnerable are the elderly, mentally impaired, children, and women.

**Abuse** is defined as treating (a person or an animal) with cruelty or violence.

**Neglect** is defined as the state or act of being uncared for or failing to provide care for properly.

**Assault** is defined as making a physical attack.

## Forms of Abuse and Neglect

**Physical abuse** is intentional bodily injury. Some examples include slapping, pinching, choking, kicking, shoving, or inappropriately using drugs or physical restraints. Signs and symptoms of physical abuse include: burns, bodily bruises, bone fractures, cuts, wounds, dislocations, sprains, poor hygiene, malnutrition, and behavioral changes.

**Sexual abuse** is nonconsensual sexual contact (any unwanted sexual contact). Examples include unwanted touching, rape, sodomy, coerced nudity, sexually explicit photographing. Signs of sexual abuse include bruising or bleeding around private areas such as the breast, anus, and genitalia. Unexplained sexual disease and/or infection can also be a sign of sexual abuse.

**Mental mistreatment or emotional abuse** is deliberately causing mental or emotional pain. Examples include intimidation, coercion, ridiculing, harassment, treating an adult like a child, isolating an adult from family, friends, or regular activity, use of silence to control behavior, and yelling or swearing which results in mental distress. Signs of emotional abuse include low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, fear, hopelessness, insecurity, withdrawal, isolation, weight gain or loss, an elder acting childlike, and refusing to talk.

**Financial/Economic Exploitation** occurs when a vulnerable adult or his/her resources or income are illegally or improperly used for another person's profit or gain. Examples include illegally withdrawing money out of another person's account, forging checks, or stealing things out of the vulnerable adult's house. Signs of financial abuse include a sudden inability to pay bills, unexplained decrease in bank accounts, unexplained transfer of possessions, and sudden inability to pay for care needed.

**Neglect** occurs when a person, either through his/her action or inaction, deprives a vulnerable adult of the care necessary to maintain the vulnerable adult's physical or mental health. Examples include not providing basic items such as food, water, clothing, a safe place to live, medicine, or health care.

Neglect may include withholding adequate meals, hydration, clothing, housing, education, medical treatment, medication, and hygiene. Withholding physical aids such as hearing aids, glasses, ambulating aids (walkers,

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canes, wheelchairs, etc.), false teeth, or safety precautions (night lights, safety bars, call light etc.) are also neglect. Health care providers can unknowingly neglect patients by leaving a patient on the bedpan for an extended period of time, moving walking aid devices out of reach keeping patients in bed, charting a patient has been repositioned but forgetting to do so, or moving a call button out of reach.

**Self-neglect** occurs when a vulnerable adult fails to provide adequately for themselves and jeopardizes his/her well-being. Examples include a vulnerable adult living in hazardous, unsafe, or unsanitary living conditions or not having enough food or water.

**Abandonment** occurs when a vulnerable adult is left without the ability to obtain necessary food, clothing, shelter or health care. Examples include deserting a vulnerable adult in a public place or leaving a vulnerable adult at home without the means of getting basic life necessities.

## Elder

The Centers for Disease Control and prevention defines elder abuse as an intentional act, or failure to act, by a caregiver or another person in a relationship involving an expectation of trust that causes or creates a risk of harm to an older adult (An older adult is defined as someone age 60 or older). Forms of Elder abuse include: physical, sexual or abusive sexual contact, emotional or psychological, neglect or financial abuse or exploitation of an elderly person. It may or may not be intentional, and an older adult will often suffer several forms of abuse and neglect at the same time.

### Who is Subject to Elder and Abuse

Research indicates that older adults from all walks of life can be victims of abuse – men and women from all racial, ethnic, and economic groups.

- Elders age 80 and older, and those with physical or mental impairments, are more likely to be abused than any other
- Elder abuse, including neglect and exploitation, is experienced by an estimated one out of every ten people ages 60 and older who lives at home

### Who are the Abusers

Abusers can be family members, caregivers, or strangers, including both men and women. Family members are most often the abusers outside of healthcare facilities and may continue abusing elders even after the person has entered a long-term care facility or a hospital. Patients or residents should be routinely checked for injuries, as this may reveal a pattern of abuse. Strangers can also be abusers, particularly in instances of assault or financial abuse. Be on the lookout for con artists or anyone who appears out of place in or around the facility.

### Why does Abuse and Neglect Matter

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Abuse and neglect can arise from misunderstanding, ignorance, and frustration with the elderly, because they don't really understand the effects of aging. Care givers fail to give elders the extra time they may need to process information, respond to questions, or perform tasks. Risk factors that contribute to abuse and neglect include:

- Caregivers with an abusive history may continue that behavior at work
- Caregivers with little or no formal training or support can be overwhelmed by caring for a dependent elder
- Seniors who are abusive to their caregivers compound the stress factor
- Seniors may have abrasive personalities or have Alzheimer's disease and a lack of self- control
- Unresolved conflicts between family members or an elder's history of abusive relationships are warning signs
- Mental illness, alcoholism, or drug abuse – in elders or caregivers – signal the potential for abuse and neglect

## Child

Child abuse is more than bruises or broken bones. While physical abuse often leaves visible scars, not all child abuse is as obvious, but can do just as much harm. It is important that individuals working with and around children be able to know what constitutes child abuse or child neglect and know how to identify potential signs. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention links adverse childhood experiences (which include other household dysfunctions along with abuse and neglect) with a range of long-term health impacts.

### Child Abuse Statistics

Child abuse is categorized into one of four harm types: emotional abuse, neglect, physical abuse and sexual abuse. At least 1 in 7 children have experienced child abuse and/or neglect in the past year, and this is likely an underestimate. In 2014, state agencies identified an estimated 1,580 children who died as a result of abuse and neglect. This averages between four and five children a day.

Child abuse is defined as 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. More than 70% of the children who died as a result of child abuse or neglect were two years of age or younger. More than 80% were not yet old enough for kindergarten.

### Who are the Abusers

Child abusers generally include parents, guardians, foster parents, relatives, or other caregivers responsible for the child's welfare. Around 80% of child maltreatment fatalities involve at least one parent as perpetrator.

### Warning Signs of Child Abuse

- Excessively withdrawn, fearful or anxious about doing something wrong
- Doesn't seem attached to the caregiver
- Frequent injuries or unexplained bruises

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- Wears inappropriate clothing to cover up injuries
  - Hygiene is consistently bad
  - Untreated illnesses and physical injuries
  - Trouble walking or sitting
  - Doesn't want to change clothes in front of others
  - Diagnosed with a sexually transmitted disease or pregnancy

## Domestic

Domestic violence (also called intimate partner violence (IPV), domestic abuse or relationship abuse) is a pattern of behaviors used by one partner to maintain power and control over another partner in an intimate relationship.

### Who are the Abused

Domestic violence does not discriminate. Anyone of any race, age, sexual orientation, religion or gender can be a victim – or perpetrator – of domestic violence. It can happen to people who are married, living together or who are dating. It affects people of all socioeconomic backgrounds and education levels.

### What is Domestic Abuse

Domestic violence includes behaviors that physically harm, arouse fear, prevent a partner from doing what they wish or force them to behave in ways they do not want. It includes the use of physical and sexual violence, threats and intimidation, emotional abuse and economic deprivation. Many of these different forms of domestic violence/abuse can be occurring at any one time within the same intimate relationship.

## Human Trafficking

Human trafficking involves the use of force, fraud, or coercion to obtain some type of labor or commercial sex act. Language barriers, fear of their traffickers, and/or fear of law enforcement frequently keep victims from seeking help, making human trafficking a hidden crime.

Traffickers often look for people who are susceptible for a variety of reasons, including psychological or emotional vulnerability, economic hardship, lack of a social safety net, natural disasters, or political instability.

### Who are the Trafficked

Human trafficking can happen in any community and victims can be any age, race, gender, or nationality.

- The Department of Justice has reported that more than half of sex-trafficking victims are 17 years old or younger
- The annual number of persons prosecuted for commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) cases filed in U.S. district court nearly doubled between 2004 and 2013, increasing from 1,405 to 2,776 cases.

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## Who are the Traffickers

Traffickers can be any age, race, gender, or nationality and range from small-time solo operators to loose networks of criminals and highly sophisticated criminal organizations.

- Most suspects arrested for CSEC crimes were male (97 percent), were U.S. citizens (97 percent), were white (82 percent), had no prior felony convictions (79 percent) and were not married (70 percent).
- CSEC suspects had a median age of 39 years, and more than half (56 percent) had no more than a high school education.

Human trafficking is a major public health problem, both domestically and internationally. Health care providers are often the only professionals to interact with trafficking victims who are still in captivity. The expert assessment and interview skills of providers contribute to their readiness to identify victims of trafficking.

## Clinician's Responsibility in Reporting Abuse and Neglect

It is your ethical and legal responsibility to intervene immediately when you see a child, elder, or mentally handicapped person be abused or neglected or when you suspect it.

Anytime abuse is witnessed, or suspected, it must be documented and reported to the charge nurse, case manager, or social worker then reported to Child or Adult Protective Services.

When abuse or neglect is suspected, the abused should be assessed without the suspected abuser present. The abused should be asked directly if someone hurt them, threatened them, or took anything without asking, and if yes, who. If your facility has Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) follow your facility's guidelines for engaging the SANE Nurse.

Every report can be anonymous, and no one can be charged for falsely reporting an abuse or neglect case, but failure to report can result in a claim of negligence.

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