

Warning Signs of Elder Abuse

A comprehensive checklist for families, friends, neighbours, and caregivers | Situation Guide: Recognizing Elder Abuse | thevettedsenior.com

How to use this checklist: Work through each section and check any signs that apply. You do not need multiple checkmarks or certainty before seeking help. A single unexplained sign is enough reason to call. You can report concerns anonymously in most areas. Use the writing lines in each section to record what you observed and when.

Section 1: Physical Signs

- Unexplained bruises, cuts, burns, or welts
- Bruises in unusual locations: upper arms, torso, face, or inner thighs
- Injuries at different stages of healing at the same time
- An injury is inconsistently or implausibly explained
- Signs of being restrained: rope marks or bruising on wrists or ankles
- Head injuries or patches of hair loss
- Broken bones, especially repeated fractures
- Bite marks or signs of rough handling
- The caregiver insists on being present during all medical exams
- There are delays in seeking medical care for injuries
- The person flinches, pulls away, or seems afraid of touch
- The caregiver speaks for the person and prevents them from speaking
- Medical records show frequent emergency visits for unexplained accidents
- The person appears heavily sedated or unusually drowsy without clear medical cause
- The person's account of how an injury happened changes from one telling to the next

Notes / observations for this section:

Section 2: Emotional and Behavioural Signs

- Withdrawal, fearfulness, or unusual anxiety that is new or increasing
- Sudden changes in mood, personality, or behaviour
- Reluctance to speak freely, especially when a specific person is present
- Expressions of shame, worthlessness, or hopelessness
- Reports of being yelled at, threatened, humiliated, or controlled
- Reluctance to discuss personal, financial, or daily life matters
- Disinterest in activities, hobbies, or people they previously enjoyed
- Avoidance of eye contact when a particular person is nearby
- Excessive deference or agreement with a specific caregiver or person
- Marked anxiety when the caregiver is mentioned or enters the room
- Statements such as 'I deserve this' or 'I am a burden to everyone'
- Sleep disturbances, nightmares, or new fearfulness at night
- Sudden withdrawal from contact with family or friends
- Refusal of visits from people they previously enjoyed seeing
- Signs of depression: flat affect, tearfulness, prolonged withdrawal
- New confusion or disorientation without a clear medical explanation

Notes / observations for this section:

Section 3: Financial Signs

- Unexplained or large withdrawals from bank accounts
- Transfers of money to unfamiliar individuals or accounts
- Bills unpaid or services disconnected despite adequate income or savings
- Sudden or unexplained changes to a will, trust, or beneficiary designations
- A new power of attorney signed under unclear or pressured circumstances
- Missing cash, jewellery, valuables, or personal possessions
- Credit cards used without the person's knowledge or consent
- Unfamiliar signatures on financial, legal, or property documents
- New acquaintances with unusual or intrusive interest in the person's finances
- A caregiver or family member controls all mail, phone access, and financial documents
- The person is unaware of their own financial situation or account balances
- Unexplained loans or financial commitments the person cannot explain
- Sudden purchase of items the person did not want or did not choose
- Property titles or vehicles transferred without a clear or voluntary reason
- The person is asked to sign documents they cannot read or properly understand

Notes / observations for this section:

Section 4: Signs of Neglect (by a caregiver or through self-neglect)

- Poor hygiene, unwashed clothing, or persistent body odour
- Malnutrition or significant unexplained weight loss
- Dehydration without a clear medical explanation
- Medications not being given, tracked, or managed correctly
- Pressure sores or bedsores from being left in one position too long
- Untreated medical conditions, wounds, or infections
- Living space that is unsafe, cold, dirty, or in serious disrepair
- Insufficient food in the home for the person's needs
- Necessary aids missing: glasses, hearing aids, dentures, or mobility devices
- The caregiver is consistently unavailable, absent, or unreachable when needed
- The caregiver openly expresses resentment, frustration, or hostility toward the person
- The caregiver appears impaired, unwell, or unable to provide appropriate care
- The person is left alone for long periods without check-ins or emergency access
- Medical appointments are being consistently missed or cancelled
- The home is excessively cluttered or presents a clear fall or fire hazard
- The person has no access to outside contact, visitors, or community

Notes / observations for this section:

Section 5: Fraud, Scams, and Digital Abuse

- Unsolicited calls about prizes, debts, utility problems, or government benefits
- Gifts, gift cards, or money sent to people the person has never met in person
- A new romantic partner met online who is requesting money or personal information
- Unexplained purchases, subscriptions, or donations the person cannot explain
- Pressure from callers to act immediately and to keep this secret
- Callers claiming to be from a government agency demanding urgent payment
- An unusually large volume of charitable solicitation mail
- The person appears confused, distressed, or secretive after phone calls or online sessions
- Accounts accessed from unfamiliar devices, locations, or at unusual times
- Social media activity or messages that seem out of character
- Pressure to pay for products, services, or fees using gift cards
- The person has shared passwords, PINs, or financial details with online contacts

Notes / observations for this section:

Section 6: Signs of Abuse in a Care Facility (retirement home, long-term care, hospital)

- Staff are dismissive, impatient, rough, or openly disrespectful toward residents
- Family visits are discouraged, restricted, or made difficult by staff
- The person seems afraid to speak in front of certain staff members
- Unexplained injuries, bruises, or changes in the person's physical condition
- The person appears unusually sedated without a clear medical reason
- Staff cannot explain injuries or changes in the resident's condition
- Personal belongings, money, or valuables are missing or unaccounted for
- The resident is frequently left in soiled clothing for extended periods
- The resident's requests, complaints, or needs are consistently ignored
- The facility is visibly understaffed during visits
- Complaints raised with management are dismissed or not investigated
- The resident asks to leave, expresses fear of the facility, or fear of specific staff
- Other residents or visitors have raised similar concerns
- There are visible signs of unsanitary conditions or poor infection control

Notes / observations for this section:

If you have checked any item above: here is what to do

- If there is immediate physical danger: Call emergency services now. Canada and USA: 911 | UK: 999 | Australia: 000 | Other: local emergency number
- If the situation is serious but not an immediate emergency: Contact adult protective services, your local health authority, or a senior helpline. You do not need proof to make a call.
- If you are unsure which agency to contact: Call any senior helpline and they will direct you. In many areas you can report completely anonymously.

