



# NEW ENGLAND LEARNING CENTER FOR WOMEN IN TRANSITION

479 Main Street, PO Box 520, Greenfield MA 01302 ♦ (413) 772-0871 ♦ fax (413) 772-2743 ♦ [www.nelcwit.org](http://www.nelcwit.org)

## ~ Elder Abuse ~

There is no age limit when it comes to domestic violence.

- Domestic violence affects individuals of all ages, economic levels, religions, cultures, geographic areas, sexual orientations, abilities and disabilities, genders, and professions.
- Domestic violence may be committed against someone who is healthy, in poor health, or disabled, or anywhere in between.
- A spouse, companion, relative, caregiver, or stranger may perpetrate the abuse.
- If the abuser is the primary caregiver, the victim may become more dependent on the abuser and more isolated from others.

### A Few Statistics

- In Massachusetts, an elder is legally defined as a person who is 60 or older.
- Female elders experience abuse at a higher rate than male elders.
- Those aged 80 and older are abused and neglected at 2-3 times their proportion in the elderly population.
- In almost 90% of elder abuse cases, the perpetrator is a family member. In 2/3 of elder abuse cases, the perpetrator is either a son or daughter or a spouse.

### At any age, the impact of abuse is profound.

- The victim may feel fear, isolation, shame, helplessness, and physical or emotional pain.
- She or he may feel that there are no options.
- The victim may be dependent on the abuser. She or he may love the abuser.

### Signs that a person may be a victim of elder abuse:

- Has repeated "accidental" injuries
- Appears isolated
- Indicates, acts, or hints at being afraid
- Considers or attempts suicide
- Has a history of alcohol or drug (including prescription drug) abuse
- Presents as a "difficult" client or patient
- Has vague, chronic complaints
- Is unable to follow through with treatment plans or medical care, or misses appointments frequently
- Has severe depression

### Signs that a person may be a perpetrator of elder abuse:

- Attempts to convince others that the elder is incompetent or crazy
- Is overly attentive to the elder
- Controls the elder's activities
- Says things like, "she's so stupid," "isn't he difficult?," or "she's stubborn"
- Talks about the elder as if she or he is not a person
- Is either verbally abusive or overly friendly and charming to service providers

- Refuses to allow an interview or exam to take place unless present

Elders face unique barriers to disclosing domestic violence.

Fears of revealing the abuse are very real and often very well founded.

Elder domestic violence victims, especially if physically frail or disabled, may fear:

- Being institutionalized or displaced from their homes
- Losing of independence
- Losing of benefits or health insurance
- Losing their caregivers

In addition, they may:

- Have limited economic options and resources
- Feel uncomfortable asking for help
- Be unaware of services
- Have been turned down, ridiculed, or denied services in the past, and not realize that more help is available now.

Elder abuse victims may also:

- Not realize that verbal, physical, and emotional abuse are not "normal" parts of relationships
- Hold strong religious or cultural beliefs regarding marriage and family loyalty

Elder abuse can take many forms, including:

*Abuse or neglect based on dependency:*

- Removes needed aids such as wheelchair, walker, glasses, dentures
- Takes advantage of confusion
- Withholds food, care, medication, or heat
- Doesn't report medical problems
- Fails to follow medical, therapeutic, or safety recommendations
- Intentionally misses medical appointments

*Emotional abuse:*

- Humiliates, uses demeaning language or actions, or ridicules the elder
- Yells, insults or calls names
- Degrades or blames the elder
- Withholds affection
- Uses silence or profanity inappropriately
- Intentionally engages in crazy-making behavior (for example, moving furniture and then saying it's always been that way)

*Using family members:*

- Magnifies disagreements
- Misleads others about extent and nature of health conditions
- Isolates from family
- Forces family to keep secrets

*Ridiculing values or spirituality:*

- Makes fun of person's values
- Denies access to church or clergy
- Forbids or ridicules religious or cultural traditions

*Using privilege:*

- Treats individual like a servant
- Makes all major decisions even if the elder is competent to make own decisions

*Financial:*

- Steals money, possessions, or titles
- Spends money without permission
- Takes over accounts and bills
- Abuses having power of attorney

*Threatens or intimidates:*

- Threatens to leave, divorce, or institutionalize the individual
- Threatens to commit suicide
- Destroys property
- Threatens to harm the elder
- Displays weapons

*Physical violence:*

Slaps, hits, punches, kicks, burns, chokes, throws things at, or otherwise physically harms the elder

*Sexual abuse:*

- Makes demeaning remarks about intimate body parts
- Is rough with intimate body parts during caregiving
- Takes advantage of physical or mental illness to engage in sexual acts
- Forces sexual acts that make the elder uncomfortable or are against his or her wishes
- Forces individual to watch pornographic movies or sexual acts

*Controlling behaviors:*

- Withholds food or medication
- Denies assistance with bathing or cleaning
- Denies access to communication or visits with loved ones

**Types of domestic violence in later life:**

*Long-term: A long-term abusive relationship continues to be abusive in later years. Jane and Joe have been married for 50 years. Joe began abusing Jane shortly after their marriage and has continued to abuse her since then.*

*Late onset abuse: A long-term relationship becomes abusive in later years. Jane and Joe have been married for 50 years. In the last four years, Joe has become abusive to Jane.*

*Reverse domestic violence: A long term abusive relationship in which the perpetrator and victim reverse roles in later years. Jane and Joe have been married for 50 years. Joe was abusive to Jane throughout the first 40 years of their marriage. Joe is now frail and needs assistance. Jane has become abusive to Joe.*

*New abusive relationship: A new relationship between elders in which one party is abusive to the other. Jane and Joe are 65 and 70 years old. They started dating 3 months ago. He is abusive to her.*

For more information about elder abuse: