



Abuse, Neglect & Exploitation: Definitions & Warning Signs

Abuse

Abuse is inappropriate treatment of an individual. It includes physical, psychological, emotional, and sexual abuse.

Physical abuse is the use of physical force that may result in bodily injury, physical pain, or impairment. Examples include striking (with or without an object), hitting, beating, pushing, shoving, shaking, slapping, kicking, pinching, burning, inappropriate use of drugs and physical restraints, force-feeding, and physical punishment.

Psychological or emotional abuse is causing anguish, pain or distress to another person through verbal or nonverbal acts. Examples include verbal assaults, insults, threats, intimidation, humiliation, and harassment.

Sexual abuse is sexual contact or photographs of a person without permission. Also sexual contact with any person incapable of giving consent. Examples include unwanted touching and all types of sexual assault or battery including rape, sodomy, coerced nudity, and sexually explicit photographing.

Neglect

Neglect is the refusal or failure of a caregiver to provide for the needs of a child or vulnerable adult.

Needs are the care, goods, and services necessary to maintain the health or safety of an individual. Examples include food, water, clothing, medicine, shelter, supervision, personal safety, personal hygiene, and medical services.

Neglect can be repeated conduct or a single incident when the result could be serious physical or psychological harm or substantial risk of death.

Exploitation

Exploitation is taking improper advantage of an individual. It can involve finances, material, labor, or activity.

Financial or material exploitation is the improper, illegal, or unauthorized use of an individual's funds, assets, property, power of attorney, guardianship or conservatorship for the profit or advantage of anyone besides the individual. Examples include cashing someone's checks without permission, forging someone's signature, misusing or stealing someone's money or possessions, and coercing or deceiving someone into signing any document.

Labor or activity exploitation is causing or requiring an individual to engage in work or any activity which is improper, illegal, demeaning, or against the reasonable and rational wishes of the individual. Examples include forced chores or activities which are not a part of an individual's written plan of care or which are not prescribed or authorized by the individual's physician.

Warning Signs

Physical Abuse

- Bruises, black eyes, welts, cuts, or rope marks
- Broken bones or skull fractures
- Open wounds, cuts, punctures, untreated injuries in various stages of healing
- Sprains, dislocations, or internal injuries/bleeding
- Broken eyeglasses/frames, physical signs of being subjected to punishment, or signs of being restrained
- An individual's report of being hit, slapped, kicked or mistreated
- A caregiver's refusal to allow visitors to visit the individual alone

Psychological or Emotional Abuse

- Emotionally upset or agitated
- Extremely and unusually withdrawn, not communicating or not responding
- Unusual, childlike behavior (sucking, biting, rocking)
- An individual's report of being verbally or emotionally mistreated

Sexual Abuse

- Bruises around the breasts or genital area
- Unexplained venereal disease or genital infections
- Unexplained vaginal or anal bleeding
- Torn, stained, or bloody underclothing
- An individual's report of being sexually assaulted or raped

Neglect

- Dehydration, malnutrition, untreated bed sores, or poor personal hygiene

- Unattended or untreated health problems
- Hazardous or unsafe living conditions/arrangements (improper wiring, no heat, or no running water)
- Unsanitary and unclean living conditions (dirt, fleas, lice on person, soiled bedding, fecal/urine smell, or inadequate clothing)
- An individual's report of being mistreated

Financial or Material Exploitation

- Sudden changes in bank account or banking practice, including an unexplained withdrawal of large sums of money by a person accompanying the individual
- Addition of names on an individual's bank signature card
- Unauthorized withdrawal of funds with an ATM card
- Abrupt changes in a will or other financial documents
- Unexplained disappearance of funds or valuable possessions
- Substandard care being provided or bills unpaid despite the availability of adequate financial resources
- Discovery of forged signature or documents
- Sudden appearance of previously uninvolved relatives claiming rights to an individual's affairs or possessions
- Unexplained or sudden transfer of assets to a family member or someone outside the family
- Provision of services that are not necessary
- An individual's report of exploitation

Activity or Labor Exploitation

- An individual's report of being forced to participate in activities that are not part of a care plan, such as forced chores or labor

Protections

There are several laws that protect vulnerable individuals from abuse, neglect, and exploitation. These laws and other agency regulations explain how to report suspected or actual knowledge of abuse and neglect. Please see the Disability Rights South Carolina publication on "Reporting Abuse & Neglect."

In emergency situations, and when in doubt where to report abuse, neglect, or exploitation, contact local law enforcement.

This publication provides legal information but is not intended to be legal advice. As the law may change, please contact Disability Rights SC for updates. Please let us know if you would like this

information in an alternative format.

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