

Division of Aging and Adult Services

Issue Brief – Vulnerable Adult and Elder Abuse Awareness

Building a Livable and Senior-Friendly North Carolina

“Living Wise and Aging Well”

Protecting Older Adults and Adults with Disabilities A Community Responsibility

What is Elder Abuse?

In North Carolina, the Adult Protective Services (APS) statute addresses abuse, neglect by a caretaker, self-neglect, and exploitation of adults who are not able to protect themselves. Mistreatment takes on many forms – physical abuse, unreasonable confinement, withholding of needed care or treatment, sexual and financial exploitation, and neglect of one’s self because of illness, limited family support and/or resources.

How will I know if someone is being abused, neglected or exploited?

Abuse:

- Unexplained bruises, welts, crusts and scratches, rope burns
- Broken bones and fractures
- Open wounds, untreated injuries in various stages of healing
- Broken eyeglasses
- Reports of being hit, slapped, kicked
- Sudden change in behavior
- Adult seems intimidated, stressed or depressed

Exploitation:

- Missing ATM or credit cards
- Transfer of property or frequent loans to family members or others
- Adult not allowed to make or participate in financial decisions
- Frequent entries in sweepstakes
- Large amounts of mail from sweepstakes agencies or investment schemes
- Frequent calls by telemarketers
- Family or others dependent on adult for financial support

Neglect:

- Pressure Ulcers
- Unsafe or unsanitary living conditions
- Lack of adequate medical care
- Malnutrition and dehydration
- Clothing not suitable for weather conditions
- Confusion

What can I do?

North Carolina is a mandatory reporting state. Any person, regardless of affiliation, who believes an older adult or adult with disabilities is being abused, neglected or exploited is required to report the situation to the local county department of social services where the adult is located. This aspect of the law may seem intimidating to some – what if the adult finds out I made the report? What if I am wrong? Will I be sued? While these fears are real for some, there are built-in protections for reporters. The names of individuals making an APS report are not released unless required by court order. Regarding liability, the statute does not place any burden of proof on the reporter. Once a situation is reported to the DSS, it is up to the professionals to evaluate the information to determine if mistreatment is present. Finally, we must ask ourselves, what will happen if I don’t report?

To find out more about Vulnerable Adult and Elder Abuse Awareness, go to: www.ncdhhs.gov/aging/eaday