

# ELDER AND AT-RISK ADULT ABUSE, NEGLECT AND EXPLOITATION

## RESOURCE GUIDE



**DENVER**  
HUMAN SERVICES

**Denver Human Services (DHS)** receives thousands of calls a year from people concerned about an adult friend, loved one, neighbor or community member whom they believe is an at-risk adult (18 years and older) who may be experiencing abuse, neglect or exploitation.

When a person calls to make a report, it is evaluated by a team of skilled social case workers and when information indicates potential abuse, neglect or exploitation, a social caseworker reaches out to investigate and offer help (if the at-risk adult consents to services).

If you believe an at-risk adult may be the victim of abuse, neglect or exploitation, please report it to the Denver Adult Protection Hotline or your local law enforcement.

In the case of a life-threatening emergency, dial 9-1-1 immediately.

You will be asked for:

- Name, contact information and description of the at-risk adult
- Your name, address and contact information\*
- Name and any known contact information for the alleged perpetrator
- Name and contact information for any other known involved parties
- Nature and extent of suspected abuse

\*Caller information may be kept confidential.

**NOTE:** Colorado legally requires many service professionals to report suspected abuse of persons 70 or older or those with an intellectual or developmental disability to law enforcement. In Denver, please call the Denver Police Department at 720-913-2000 to report concerns. You might save a life!

The information in this guide is aimed at educating people about how to spot signs of abuse, neglect and exploitation and how to report it. When in doubt, please always report your concerns.

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## **SIGNS OF PHYSICAL ABUSE**

Abuse of an elder is defined as a willful act or omission of a caregiver or any other person which results in physical injury, mental anguish, unreasonable confinement, sexual abuse or exploitation, or financial exploitation to a person. Signs of physical abuse may include:

- Multiple bruises that are not consistent with a fall
- Black eyes, slap marks, kick marks, grasp marks or fingertip bruising
- Fractures that are not consistent with a fall
- Burns
- Smell of urine or feces
- Administration of inappropriate drugs

## **SIGNS OF NEGLECT**

Neglect represents the failure of a caregiver to provide essential services necessary to maintain the physical and/or mental health of a vulnerable adult such as:

- Abandonment or isolation
- Not providing proper food and/or fluids
- Failure to provide proper health care
- Lack of personal care
- Inappropriate dress
- Being left to sit in urine/feces
- Absence of mobility aids causing restrictive movement
- Absence of necessary medication or medical equipment
- Improper fitting or damaged dentures
- Evidence of malnutrition or overfeeding

## **SIGNS OF FINANCIAL EXPLOITATION**

Exploitation means taking an at-risk adult's money or other assets against their will or without their knowledge or consent. In other words, it is stealing from the adult. It also means deceiving, harassing, intimidating or exerting undue influence to get the adult to do something against his or her will.

Examples of financial exploitation may include:

- Stealing cash or credit cards
- Cashing benefits or pension payments without giving them to the beneficiary
- Telling someone something cost more than it did
- Abusing position as appointee or Power of Attorney to withhold money from the at-risk person
- Withholding money so a person is unable to afford necessities
- Persuading or forcing the at-risk adult to transfer money, bank accounts, property, assets or financial affairs to another person
- Not allowing the at-risk adult to be admitted to residential care because it may impact an inheritance

## **MAKE THE CALL**

Every call made to the Adult Protection Hotline (720-944-4DHS) is handled with the utmost care and consideration and the caller's information is kept confidential. If you have concerns about abuse, neglect or exploitation of an elder or an adult with an intellectual or developmental disability, please make the call. It could make a real difference in someone's life.

### **References**

- Pritchard, J. (1996). Working With Elder Abuse. Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.*
- Bratteli, Maryls (2003). The Journey Through Caregiving: Caregiver Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation. Fargo, ND: North Dakota State University.*

CASE

1

A CALL FROM A CONCERNED NEIGHBOR

Caller, who wishes to remain anonymous, contacts the Adult Protection Hotline (720-944-4DHS) about concerns for a neighbor. Caller tells the operator that the neighbor is not taking medications on a regular basis and has a number of medical problems, including congestive heart failure, high blood pressure and malnourishment. Caller believes neighbor has dementia and informs the operator that neighbor has no nearby family or friends. She asks for Denver Human Services (DHS) to check on the neighbor.

ACTION TAKEN BY  
DENVER ADULT  
PROTECTIVE SERVICES



**a** Following the call, a DHS social caseworker visits the neighbor's home to investigate.



**b** To address medical needs, the caseworker contacts a long-term care day program. The program agrees to provide transportation, lunch and social activities for the neighbor.



**c** The caseworker arranges for a home health agency to manage medications and medical appointments on a weekly basis.



**d** The elder is now thriving thanks to the call from a concerned neighbor.

CASE

2

A CALL FROM A CONCERNED DOCTOR

A doctor calls the Adult Protection Hotline (720-944-4DHS) requesting an assessment of a patient. He explains that the 32-year-old patient is HIV-positive, suffers from mental illness and has delayed development. He believes the patient is prostituting to survive. The doctor is extremely concerned about the patient's well-being and asked Denver Human Services to investigate.

ACTION TAKEN BY  
DENVER ADULT  
PROTECTIVE SERVICES



**a** A DHS social caseworker finds the patient living in a motel and offers assistance. The caseworker determines the patient is ill and needs immediate medical attention.



**b** After a lengthy conversation, the caseworker convinces the patient to go to a local hospital for treatment.



**c** After the assessment, the caseworker determines the woman is unable to care for herself and works to place the patient with her mother, who agrees to become power of attorney.



**d** The patient is now in a safe environment and being cared for by a loving family member.

CASE

3

A CALL FROM A CONCERNED RESIDENT

During a trip to a grocery store, a concerned resident offers to give an elderly man a ride home after observing he lacked transportation. The two remain in touch, and within a month, the man makes various requests, including borrowing money for food and asking for rides to the doctor's office. He tells the concerned resident that he often sends money to Jamaica. The concerned resident calls the Adult Protection Hotline (720-944-4DHS) to ask if a social caseworker can investigate.

ACTION TAKEN BY  
DENVER ADULT  
PROTECTIVE SERVICES



**a** A DHS social caseworker visits the man at his apartment and discovers that he has cancer, cannot pay his bills and is worried about getting evicted.



**b** The caseworker arranges for meals to be brought daily, links him to subsidized housing options and helps him apply for Medicaid.



**c** The caseworker also informs the man of lottery scams in other countries, advises him to stop sending money to Jamaica and alerts the Denver District Attorney about a possible scam incident.



**d** Within weeks the man is moved into a new apartment and receives proper medical treatment via Medicaid thanks to the call from the concerned resident.

CASE

4

A CALL FROM A FAMILY MEMBER

A caller to the Adult Protection Hotline (720-944-4DHS) informs a social caseworker that her brother is taking money from their mother. The caller reports that the brother received a \$40,000 check from her mom to pay bills but that the brother failed to pay the bills. The caller asks for a social caseworker to investigate.

ACTION TAKEN BY  
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**a** A DHS social caseworker makes several attempts to contact the caller's mother.



**b** Finally reached, the woman confides to the caseworker that she is afraid of her son and does not think he used her money to pay the bills.



**c** Worried for the woman's safety, the caseworker contacts the police and Denver District Attorney's Office and asks them to investigate and ensure the woman is fully protected from future potential exploitation.

CASE

5

A CALL FROM A FELLOW STUDENT

A student calls the Adult Protection Hotline (720-944-4DHS) to express concern a fellow student (18 years of age or older) who has what appear to be cigarette burns on his body. The caller states that the student has been picking at the burn scars, causing additional damage to his skin. The caller asks a social caseworker to investigate.

ACTION TAKEN BY  
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**a** The DHS social caseworker contacts the school administration and discovers that the student has a developmental disability.



**b** The caseworker conducts a site visit at the student's home and interviews his caretakers.



**c** The caseworker determines there is no abuse or self-neglect and refers the student to an organization that provides counseling services for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

MANDATORY REPORTING

Colorado legally requires many service professionals to report suspected abuse of persons 70 or older or those with an intellectual or developmental disability. These individuals are known as mandatory reporters and they are required to report their concerns to law enforcement within 24 hours of becoming aware of the suspected mistreatment.

In Denver, mandatory reporters should contact the Denver Police Department at 720-913-2000. All non-mandatory reporters, or anyone questioning whether they should be making a report, are encouraged to call the Adult Protection Hotline at 720-944-4DHS (4347).

To find out more about mandatory reporting and who is considered a mandatory reporter in Colorado, visit [www.coloradoaps.com/about-mandatory-reporting.html](http://www.coloradoaps.com/about-mandatory-reporting.html).



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WEB  
[denvergov.org/humanservices](https://denvergov.org/humanservices)

DENVER ADULT PROTECTION HOTLINE  
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