



Abuse and Neglect: IT'S NOT OKAY!



Abuse and neglect cannot be tolerated. As a supporter, you are on the frontline with a responsibility to keep the people you support free from harm.

How Do I Know It's Happening?

The first step to STOP abuse and neglect is to recognize it. There are three ways to know when abuse and neglect happen: **you see it, you are told about it, or you suspect it is happening.**

1. **You see it.** People can be hurt or made to feel bad in many ways: physical, sexual, neglect, emotional or financial. Here are some examples of abuse or neglect you might see:

- **Physical abuse:** You see a person being hit, slapped, shaken, shoved, choked, or otherwise harmed.
- **Sexual abuse:** You see someone being forced into sexual activity against their will.
- **Abuse by Neglect:** You see a person is not getting needed medical care or medications; the person is without adequate food or clothing; the person is not being taken care of; or, the person is abandoned.



- **Emotional abuse:** You see someone being yelled at, bullied, threatened, or isolated.
- **Financial abuse:** You see someone stealing money or credit cards or taking financial advantage of the person in some way.

2. **You are told about it.** When someone tells you they have been abused or neglected, **LISTEN!** Don't ignore or dismiss the person. It is often not easy for a person to come forward. They may:

- Be afraid to tell anyone.
- Think it is their own fault...that they will be punished.
- Think they just have to put up with it.
- Not understand that they are being victimized.
- Not have the words to tell you what is going on.

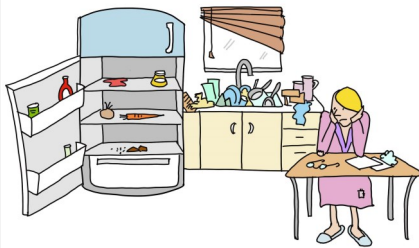
Reassure the person they are doing the right thing.

3. **You suspect it.** You may not see or hear about it, but you have reason to suspect abuse or neglect. Be on the alert for:

- Unexplained bruises, cuts, scratches, broken bones or other injuries
- Inappropriate use of physical restraint or medication



IT'S NOT OKAY! - continued



- Torn or bloody clothing
- Vaginal or rectal pain or bleeding
- Frequent urinary tract infections

- Poor grooming, dirty clothes, matted or unclean hair
- Malnutrition and dehydration
- Medical conditions that go untreated
- Clutter, filth or bad smell in the home
- Sudden fear of a person or place
- Mood swings, depression or withdrawal
- Inability to sleep, nightmares
- Missing money or credit cards
- Unpaid bills, eviction notices or discontinued utilities
- Changes in spending patterns or ATM withdrawals

These are just some of the warning signs of abuse. Always be aware of any sudden or unexplained change in a person's health or behavior. It may be a sign of abuse.

DID YOU KNOW...

If the suspected abuse occurs in a licensed facility and results in serious bodily injury, local law enforcement must be notified IMMEDIATELY - no later than 2 hours after the reporter learns of the abuse.

What Do I Do When I See, Am Told About, or Suspect It?

You REPORT It! Don't Ignore It. Take immediate action to make sure the person is safe. Then you must report suspected abuse or neglect. Incidents **must be reported to the regional center** and one or more of the following agencies for investigation and resolution:

- ⇒ **Licensing Agency, Adult Protective Services, and the Ombudsman** – for individuals living in a licensed home;
- ⇒ **Adult Protective Services** - for dependent adults and the elderly;
- ⇒ **Child Protective Services** - for children under the age of 18; and
- ⇒ **Local law enforcement.**

As a supporter, whether paid or unpaid, you are mandated to report real or suspected abuse or neglect. Each of the above agencies has specific reporting requirements. Part of your job is to learn what must be reported, to whom and by when.



What Else Can I Do To Help Prevent It?

- 1. Talk to the people you support about it.** Encourage the person to talk about things that concern them. When talking to the person you support, listen to what is being said. Let the person know that what they have to say is important to you.
- 2. Talk to other supporters.** Share this newsletter and watch the *It's Not Okay* video: <http://youtu.be/KwRX0uEawCO>. Each regional center and service provider must have a written *Zero Tolerance* policy. Become familiar with your agency's policy.
- 3. Take care of yourself.** Feeling down, frustrated, angry, exhausted? These are all signs of stress or burnout. Stress can lead to frustration and anger, which can lead to abuse and neglect. If you are having these or similar feelings, do something NOW! Talk to someone you trust. Set aside time for yourself. Take a walk, listen to music. Think positive thoughts! Laugh.