

The Family Caregiver Newsletter



*“Our prime purpose in this life is to help others.
And if you can't help them, at least don't hurt
them.”*

~ Dalai Lama

Have You Joined Yet?

The *Enhancing Your Life as a Caregiver* support group continues to gain momentum—with new family caregivers joining weekly from both New Jersey and New York.

Facilitated by Christine M. Valentin, a licensed clinical social worker, the groups meet monthly to discuss different topics and to provide family caregivers with resources and support they often need. Focused on alleviating some of the stressors that come with caring for another individual, the groups are free and welcome anyone who is caring for a loved one—especially an older adult.

If you would like to join the support group or to learn more about upcoming meetings, visit www.meetup.com/familycaregivergroup.



When we hear the word “abuse” we often think of the victims primarily being young children or middle aged women. There is, however, another cohort of individuals who also suffer abuse at the hands of relatives, health care professionals or “trusted” acquaintances. These individuals are older adults. In an effort to shed some light on the underreported problem of elder abuse, this issue of The Family Caregiver Newsletter will focus on educating readers about the different types of elder abuse, how to identify warning signs, and how caregivers can reduce their stress so as to prevent unintended outbursts from being perceived as abuse.

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Is My Loved One Vulnerable?

I believe someone may be taking advantage of my loved one but I'm not sure? How can I find out if she is being abused?

Elder abuse, as defined by the Administration on Aging, refers to “any knowing, intentional, or negligent act by a caregiver, or any other person, that causes harm or a serious risk of harm to a vulnerable adult.” In order to know whether your loved one is being abused it is important to be aware of the different types of elder abuse, how to identify them and what course of action to take.

Physical abuse is any action that causes bodily harm like hitting, pushing, or slapping. Since such actions generally result in bruising it is important to inquire about any markings you notice and make sure the explanation matches the size, color and location of the bruise. For example, a bruise that is purple or blue indicates it is a fresh bruise as opposed to one that occurred last week. While it is common for older adults to bruise easily, it is essential to inquire about any and all markings; this is especially pertinent if there have been changes in your loved one’s social environment (i.e. new friends, estranged relatives, etc.)

Financial abuse or exploitation can occur in the form of forged checks, unauthorized bank withdrawals and credit card usage and/or coaxing someone to sign over his/her property. This type of abuse can generally be identified by reviewing your loved one’s financial records and questioning any abnormal transactions you notice.

Psychological abuse can consist of yelling, threatening, or preventing an older adult from engaging in certain activities. Signs that someone is being psychologically abused can include - being “on edge” when around a particular person, telling you about “mean” things someone is saying to them, or overhearing a conversation whereby it appears someone is threatening them. Even a statement like “You better do what I say or I’m going to put you in a nursing home!” can be construed as psychological abuse.

Sexual abuse is defined as any coerced, forced or threatened attack that is sexual in nature. Sexual contact is also considered abuse if the victim is unable to give consent. Noticing this type of abuse can be harder as bruises can be in places that many people don’t see, like bruises around the chest or genital area. Aside from examining your loved one, asking directly about this type of abuse may be the only way to identify it initially.

Neglect is defined as a caregiver’s refusal or failure to provide an older adult with the care they need, especially around issues like hygiene, nutrition, medical attention, etc. If you are noticing significant changes in your loved one’s hygiene, appearance and weight, while they are under the care and supervision of a relative or health care professional, it is possible they are being neglected.

While it may be hard for us to believe older adults, especially our parents, may fall victim to abuses other than phone/mail scams, it is important to understand that by monitoring your loved one’s care and following up with any “odd behavior” you notice, it can help minimize the chances of them being taken advantage of. For more information on warning signs to look out for continue to page 3.

WARNING SIGNS

There are many warning signs that can help you detect whether your loved one is being abused. Below are a few of the signs to look out for:

Physical abuse: slap marks, bruises, lacerations, burn marks and any other bodily marks that seem abnormal.

Financial abuse: bounced checks, uncharacteristic withdrawals, insufficient funds, altered legal documents, overdue bills

Psychological abuse: social withdrawal, fear/trepidation at the mention of someone's name, unexplained alertness, harsh commands, threats made against your loved one's pet, and any other unusual behavior that is not the result of a medical condition

Sexual abuse: Unexplained sexually transmitted diseases, bruises around the genital area

Neglect: dirty clothing, body odor, weight loss, lack of medical care, filthy appearance

ELDER ABUSE RESOURCES

If you believe your loved one is being abused, your next step should be to report your suspicions to the appropriate agency or organization so that a proper investigation can be conducted.

ELDER ABUSE PREVENTION HOTLINES

When contacting your state's elder abuse hotline, a trained individual will connect you with a community organization that can assist you with your suspicion as well as other elder abuse-related issues. The community agency you are referred to may also be able to assist with counseling, case management, and legal services.

For more information, click [here](#) or contact the Eldercare Locator at **1-800-677-1116** to find an elder abuse agency near you.

ADULT PROTECTIVE SERVICES

In the event you believe a friend or neighbor is being abused, and he/she may have some memory impairment, then a call to Adult Protective Service (APS) may be warranted. Comprised of workers who investigate allegations of abuse, APS also has the authority to implement services they believe will assist the client, providing there are no competent family members involved and the client is deemed mentally incompetent. To learn more about what APS does, how they work, and who to call, click [here](#).

NATIONAL CENTER ON ELDER ABUSE PREVENTION

The National Center on Elder Abuse Prevention (NCEAP) has resources for health care professionals and families. From getting more in-depth information about the types of elder abuse to learning about the latest national statistics, this resource can prove insightful. To access these resources, visit <http://www.ncea.aoa.gov/>



HOW COULD I HAVE SAID THAT?



~ An excerpt from The Family Caregiver Blog by Christine M. Valentin

Many family caregivers have had a moment or two when they've become so frustrated when caring for another individual that they may have ended up saying or doing something they later regretted. And while they may have not intended for their actions to be harsh, it is important to understand that expressions of frustration or anger can be perceived by others as abuse. If this in anyway resonates with your situation, here are a few points to consider when trying to prevent your frustration from being perceived as abuse...

Understand Where Your Loved One is Coming From

As we age, the reality that we will need assistance to do things we were once able to do on our own becomes more prevalent. Between our body becoming more frail, our vision and hearing becoming impaired or our memory not being what it once was, at some point needing assistance seems inevitable. For many older adults, this need for assistance is synonymous with losing other freedoms like driving, living alone, managing finances, etc. And while there are definitely some situations that warrant taking away such liberties, the truth is that it's never easy to accept and as a result your loved one may make the process of caring for them more difficult. Understanding how your loved one accepts this change and how it can affect his/her well-being may give you a better sense of why they are being "difficult."

Remind Yourself of What Their Day Looks Like

For the most part, older adults are not as active as they used to be. Whether they are retired, recovering from a medical condition or just staying out of the hot/cold weather, chances are their level of socialization has declined. As a result, it is not uncommon to be bombarded with all of their thoughts, complaints or critiques upon your arrival home and for you to become frustrated. One way you can try to minimize this type of frustration is to encourage your loved one to increase his/her social interaction by going to a senior center, attending social outings or engaging in his/her hobbies. By doing so, it can allow your loved one to regain his/her sense of purpose and potentially reduce tension when you interact with each other.

Recognize Your Limitations

When you find yourself in a heated discussion with your loved one, being aware of what sets you off or gets your "blood boiling" is the first step in being able to reduce your chances of saying something negative. The next step is to walk away, meditate or simply ask your loved one to give you some time alone. Depending on your situation, any one of these techniques can help to give you a few minutes to remind yourself about the previous pointers and to calm down. Overall, the goal should be to mentally or emotionally get to a place where you will not do or say something you will later regret.

Seek Professional Help

While the above tips can work for some, they don't work for all. Factors like personality issues, past family [conflict](#) or resentment towards your loved one can serve as barriers to remaining calm. Seeking the assistance of a professional like a [social worker](#) or mediator may help you get to the bottom of the problem and assist with developing a plan of action to prevent future outbursts.

UPCOMING SUPPORT GROUPS

Sunday, August 12 5:30pm – Summit, NJ
Relieving Stress through Acupuncture

Join us to hear Karen Rodriguez, a licensed acupuncturist, talk about the benefits of acupuncture, important pressure points that can reduce some of our stress and how to incorporate brief practices into our daily lives to reduce stress. Seating is limited so RSVP is required.

Wednesday, August 15 6:00 pm – New York, NY
Remaining Strong and Positive

Whenever we care for another individual, especially an older adult, we can find ourselves feeling exhausted, frustrated, drained and angry about our responsibility. While it seems like everyone around us is "enjoying life", caregivers often have to sacrifice much of their social life in order to manage the responsibility of caring for a loved one. Join this meeting to learn how to keep your strength and positive attitude. Seating is limited so RSVP is required.

To attend any one of these meetings or to learn more about upcoming meetings in the Fall, please visit www.meetup.com/familycaregivergroup or e-mail christine.m.valentin@gmail.com for more information.



Thank you for reading this issue of The Family Caregiver Newsletter. If you have a caregiver-related question you would like to ask, feel free to e-mail your question to christine.m.valentin@gmail.com.

To stay up-to-date on the latest caregiver-related news be sure to become a fan on [Facebook](#), follow Christine on [Twitter](#) or sign up for [The Family Caregiver Blog](#).

For practical advice or counseling, Christine can be reached at (347) 565-4179.

About the Editor:

Christine M. Valentin is a licensed clinical social worker in the states of New Jersey and New York. Ms. Valentin has worked with older adults for six years and started her private practice in January 2010. Through education and support, Ms. Valentin assists family caregivers balance everyday responsibilities with their caregiving role. She offers evening and weekend appointments and also speaks Spanish. If you would like more information about the services she provides, please visit <http://www.familycaregiversocialworker.com>