

Advanced age often marks a time when an individual will require some degree of assistance with everyday life, increasing their dependency on others. Most senior citizens who require help with daily needs are able to obtain this help through family, friends, community programs (like C.A.R.E.), or elder care facilities. Unfortunately, this loss of independence can also increase a person's odds of becoming a victim of elder abuse. One in ten Americans aged 60 or older have experienced some form of elder abuse. Statistics show 400 cases of elder abuse are reported each week in Minnesota alone. One case of elder abuse is too many. We all must be aware of the issue and alert for signs of victimization in those we know. Victims of this crime may be suffering from abuse that is physical, emotional, or sexual. Or, victims may be suffering from neglect or financial exploitation. Signs of victimization include:

- Physical injuries. For example: large bruises on the face, neck, forearms or back; broken bones, cuts or burns.
- Drastic shifts in the person's financial situation. For example: there's not enough food or the electricity has been turned off.
- A drop in daily upkeep. For example: poor personal hygiene, bed sores or over-sedation.
- Unusual weight loss or weight gain.
- A new unwillingness to talk to friends or loved ones or an avoidance of certain topics.
- A withdrawal from the person's normal activities not explained by age alone.

Victims may be reluctant, unable, or afraid to report abuse. Victims may be threatened with physical or psychological harm if they report the abuse. Victims may feel a sense of shame for having allowed someone to take advantage of them. Victims may also have a misguided sense of loyalty to the person who is abusing them. Regardless of these things, the best course of action you can take when you suspect someone is a victim of elder abuse is to report what you've seen. Minnesota has established the Minnesota Adult Abuse Reporting Center (MAARC) to accept reports of elder abuse. MAARC may be contacted 24 hours a day, seven days a week by telephone at 1-844-880-1574. Reports made to MAARC are evaluated and forwarded to the appropriate human services agency and law enforcement agency for investigation.

Elder abuse can and does happen in every county of the state and frequently is perpetrated on those who are most vulnerable. Our elders deserve our respect and require our diligence to ensure Benton County is kept safe for them as well. It is up to each of us to watch for signs of abuse and speak up when we suspect someone is being abused. You can learn more about preventing elder abuse by visiting the following websites:

<https://www.cdc.gov/features/elderabuse/index.html>

<https://www.seniorliving.org/research/preventing-elder-abuse/>

For more crime prevention and safety information visit the Benton County Sheriff's Office website at: <https://www.co.benton.mn.us/211/Crime-Prevention>. You can also like and follow us on Facebook and Twitter at @BentonMNSheriff for regular updates and crime prevention messages.