

## Elder Abuse: New *SafeguardingOnline* Module Available

Protecting children from sexual abuse is such an important mission for the church. But they are not the only group of parishioners at risk. The elderly are also at risk for exploitation and abuse, including:

- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Psychological abuse
- Financial exploitation
- Neglect

That is why *SafeguardingOnline* is offering a new module to help you protect your elderly parishioners: “Recognizing Abuse and Exploitation in Elder Serving Programs.” Many clergy, vestry members, Eucharistic Ministers, and volunteers may be involved in programs to assist elderly parish members. Those programs may be in a group setting, but may also involve private visits to individuals in their homes or care facilities.

### **Risk Factors and Warning Signs**

There are risk factors and warning signs of abuse present in both the abuser and the abused.

#### ***Caregivers***

Caregivers who are at risk for committing elder abuse might exhibit signs of burnout or frustration arising from having to continuously care for the elderly patient. They may also lack understanding of the elderly person’s medical conditions or have unrealistic expectations of what he or she can and cannot do.

#### ***Elderly people***

Around 10% of adults over the age of 60 experience elder abuse, and those that are victims are at a 300% higher risk of death\*. Those most at risk often lack a social support system, have behavioral problems, or suffer from psychological illnesses.

Signs of abuse include unexplained bruises, sleeping problems and depression, or sudden behavior changes. If the elderly person is being neglected, he or she may have bedsores, dehydration or malnutrition, or frequent urinary tract infections.

#### ***Red flags***

Red flags for elder abuse include suspicious visitors requesting signatures on documents, or attempted isolation of an elderly person, such as family member requesting that the person receive no calls or visitors.

### **Allow elderly people to maintain control**

A simple way to help prevent elder abuse is for the people who work with them to give them more control of their lives and surroundings by:

- Showing them respect: This can be accomplished by something as simple as knocking on a door before you enter their private space.

- Being heard: Ensure that the elderly person can hear you by facing them when you speak and/or making sure their hearing aids are turned on.
- Listening: Let the elderly people you work with share their concerns with you. Ask them if everyone treats them well, and listen to their answers.

### **How to report abuse, and get help in your area**

People who work with the elderly have a moral — and often a legal — imperative to report abuse. Your organization likely has reporting policies in place. If you are not sure if reporting is mandated in your area, check **this resource**. If you do not know how to get help in your area, consult **this website**.

The module “Recognizing Abuse and Exploitation in Elder Serving Programs” goes into more detail about recognizing signs of the different types of abuse that an elderly person may experience.

For more information about this course, contact your diocesan safety manager.