

SafetyNetWorks

Information for Elder-Adult-at-Risk and Adult-at-Risk Agencies
AAR Information Memo #4 June 2008

IN THIS ISSUE

Many businesses, care providers, health care professionals serve elders and adults who may be at risk of abuse, neglect or financial exploitation. This SafetyNetWorks provides a one page summary of information that may be helpful to professionals in recognizing and reporting abuse.

HOW TO USE THE ATTACHED DOCUMENTS

The attached documents are incomplete without your county's contact information. There are two ways to add contact information for your Elder Adults/Adults-at-Risk agency.

1. The PDF attachment leaves space for two labels (Standard 2-across, 1 inch in height, 4 inches wide). The labels should include the name and contact information for **both** your elder adults-at-risk program and your adults-at-risk agency.
2. The Word Fillable attachment allows you to include your contact information on the form.

Finally, if these formats do not work for your agency, please e-mail us and we will provide you with a document that works for your county.

QUESTIONS

If you have questions or need a different format in order to use this document, please contact

StopAbuse@dhfs.wisconsin.gov or

CENTRAL OFFICE CONTACT:

Kay Lund

608-261-5990

Bureau of Aging and Disability Resources

Division of Long Term Care

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Protecting Wisconsin's Elders and Adults at Risk

Wisconsin has been vigilant in identifying abuse of adults who, due to age, incapacity or disability, are at risk. This information will assist professionals in determining when to report suspected abuse.

IF YOU SUSPECT ABUSE, NEGLECT OR FINANCIAL EXPLOITATION

If it is an emergency, call the police or 911 immediately.

If you need to talk to someone about
suspected abuse of an elder
(age 60 and over), contact:

If you need to talk to someone about
suspected abuse of
an adult at risk
(age 18 to 59), contact:

If you need contact information outside of your county,
visit this web site for a state-wide list at <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/Aps/>

AM I REQUIRED TO REPORT?*

For almost all situations involving abuse, neglect and exploitation of adults, Wisconsin relies on voluntary reporting. However, state law requires certain professionals¹ to report in the most egregious situations where:

- An adult at risk asks the professional to report; or
- The adult at risk is incapable of making a decision about reporting *and* is at risk of imminent serious harm; or
- There are other adults at risk who may be at risk of serious harm by a suspected perpetrator.

If a professional suspects abuse to an adult in their care, they should call their county Elder Adults/Adults at Risk Agency (see shaded area above). Not reporting is **still** allowed if the professional believes that filing the report would not be in the best interest of the adult at risk and the professional documents the basis for that determination in the client's case record. The law provides immunity to all reporters who file a report in good faith.

ELDER ADULTS/ADULTS-AT-RISK DEFINITIONS

Elder Adults/Adults-at-Risk (EA/AAR)

Agency: Each county board must designate an agency to carry out investigation of reports of abuse, neglect and exploitation. County boards also designate an **Adult Protective Services (APS)** agency responsible for providing protective services and protective placement. These agencies are often just called the county APS unit.

Adult at Risk: An adult who has a physical or mental condition that substantially impairs his or her ability to care for his or her needs who has experienced, is currently experiencing, or is at risk of experiencing abuse, neglect, or financial exploitation.

Elder Adult at Risk: An individual age 60 or older who has experienced, is currently experiencing, or is at risk of experiencing abuse, neglect, self-neglect, or financial exploitation.

¹ Employees of any entity licensed, certified or approved by, or registered with DHFS; a health care provider as defined in Wis. Stat. section 155.01(7); and social workers, professional counselors, or marriage and family therapists certified under chapter 457. [Wis. Stat. §§ 46.90(4)(ar); 55.043(1m)]

Abuse includes any of the following:

- Physical abuse - An intentional or reckless action, or a failure to act.
- Treatment without consent - the administration of medication, performance of psychosurgery, electroconvulsive therapy, or experimental research on an individual who has not provided informed consent.
- Unreasonable confinement or restraint - the intentional and unreasonable confinement of an individual in a locked room, involuntary separation of an individual from his or her living area, use of physical restraining devices, or the provision of unnecessary or excessive medication to an individual.
- Emotional abuse - Language or behavior intended to intimidate, humiliate, threaten, or otherwise harass.
- Sexual abuse as defined in criminal law.
- Neglect – Caregiver action or failure to act in maintaining adequate services or supervision, including food, clothing, shelter or health care.
- Self-neglect - Failure by the individual himself or herself to obtain adequate care, including food, shelter, clothing, medical or dental care.
- Financial Exploitation - Can include fraud, coercing someone to give against their will, theft, fiscal agent misconduct, forgery, etc.

COMMON CHARACTERISTICS

These are “red flags” to watch for but just because a person has or shows one or more of these characteristics does not mean he or she is an adult at risk. General characteristics include:

- Social or physical isolation;
- Vulnerability due to cognitive, physical or sensory impairments that limit ability to make reasoned decisions;
- Dependency, either by the perpetrator or the adult at risk;
- Compliant, submissive demeanor.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Abusers try to hide evidence of abuse. An abuser may seek to isolate the victim from others so that the abuse is not discovered. An adult at risk who is being hurt may be ashamed or embarrassed to admit what is happening. Many people fear being forced to move out of their home if their caregiver is removed. Signs to watch for include:

- Unexplained signs of injury such as bruises, welts, scars, or broken bones
- Broken eyeglasses, hearing aids or other devices
- Bruises around breasts or genitals
- Signs of being restrained, such as rope marks on wrists
- Unusual weight loss, malnutrition, dehydration
- Over-use or under-use of medications
- Disappearance of funds or possessions, unexplained withdrawals.
- Unsafe living conditions (no heat or running water; faulty wiring, other fire hazards)
- Unsanitary living conditions: dirt, bugs, soiled bedding and clothes
- Family member or caregiver's refusal to allow you to see the adult at risk alone
- Expression of fear or concern about family member or caregiver or hesitation to talk when that person is present
- Threatening, belittling, or controlling behavior
- Refusal by family member or caregiver to accept community services

Wisconsin has made great strides in identifying and protecting adults at risk. No one should experience or endure abuse, neglect or exploitation. Let individuals you are concerned about know they are not alone, that there are others who understand, do not judge, are there to help them stay safe and will support them emotionally. Provide reassurance that what they are experiencing is not their fault.

* For more information about limited required reporters and the reporting of abuse, neglect and exploitation of adults at risk see http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/dsl_info/NumberedMemos/DLTC/CY2008/sharednm2and6.pdf