



Recognizing Abuse and Neglect

Stress and isolation can breed unsafety in homes, including those where violence may not have been an issue before. Abuse and violence can lead to adverse health and mental health outcomes. You should stay vigilant for abuse and neglect at all times, including during periods of community and program closures.

What Signs Should I Look For?

It is important to know the signs of abuse because the individual might not be able to tell you what happened or may not know that the interaction was abusive.

• Physical abuse:

- Head or facial injuries;
- Burns or scalds without a good explanation;
- Unexplained injuries such as cuts, scratches, bruises, or broken bones;
- When the explanation of the cause doesn't match the injury;
- Signs of being restrained, such as abrasions or bruises on the wrists;
- Broken or missing teeth;
- Caregiver's refusal to allow you to see the individual alone.

• Sexual abuse:

- Bruising or tenderness around the breasts, genitals or inner thighs;
- Genital or anal pain or swelling;
- Unexplained genital or anal bleeding;
- Any cuts, lacerations, or injury to the genitals;
- Torn or bloody underwear or clothing;
- Pregnancy or sexually transmitted disease in an adult lacking capacity to consent;
- New sexual behaviors such as open mouth kissing, acting out sexual acts, talking about sex often;
- New behavior of putting objects into genital or anal openings.

• Emotional abuse:

- Threatening, belittling or controlling caregiver behavior that you witness;
- New rocking, sucking or mumbling.

• Neglect:

- Frequently dirty, with matted hair, or in unclean clothes;
- Poor dental hygiene;
- Untreated wound or skin care;
- Unkept medical appointments, including for urgent and chronic medical conditions;
- Unexplained or unusual weight loss;
- Unsanitary living conditions;
- Unsafe living conditions, such as no heat or air-conditioning or running water).

• Financial abuse:

- Giving or "lending" money to strangers or new acquaintances;
- Unusual or unauthorized withdrawals from accounts, including for other states or businesses not frequented.



Individuals with disabilities are at an increased risk of abuse and tend to be abused more frequently and for longer periods of time.

DisabilityJustice.org

What Other Signs Should Be Watched?

Behavior or Mood Changes

- Sadness, frequent crying;
- Not wanting to be around other people, including being withdrawn;
- New and pronounced anxiety about being with one specific person or going to a specific place;
- Trouble sleeping, including nightmares;
- New self-harm.

Why Increase Vigilance When Working Remotely?

- Individuals receiving regional services are already at a much greater risk of abuse.
- Fewer connections to social support systems reduce opportunities for abuse to be recognized and reported.
- Increased stress from a crisis can contribute to caregiver stress and violence in a home.
- With fewer visitors and opportunities for the individual to get out, fewer others can watch for signs of abuse.
- It may be difficult for individuals to talk about violence or their need for help without being overheard.

CA Dept. of Social Services provides information on local trainings for recognizing abuse and reporting guidelines.

[\(Adult Protective Services\)](#)

[\(Child Protective Services\)](#)

CA Dept. of Justice also provides training videos on reporting abuse.

[\(Your Legal Duty Part 1\)](#)

[\(Your Legal Duty Part 2\)](#)

Recognizing Abuse Using Telecommunication

Individual Interaction

- Does the individual seem fearful of the caregiver? Is the individual allowed to communicate for themselves?
- Does the individual appear in pain? Does the individual seem “shutdown”?
- Ask questions like: “What did you do at home today?”, “What is your favorite thing about being at home?”, and “What is the worst thing?”
- Does the individual hesitate in answering because someone else is in the room?

Caregiver Interaction

- Are caregivers avoiding or interrupting specific questions?
- Listen to how caregivers describe their interactions with the individual. Does their description suggest frustration with the individual?
- Observed body language. Do caregivers seem to be more tense than before?

Home Environment

- If you are using a video call, pay attention to the background. Do you see any safety hazards?
- Listen to background noise. Can yelling or screaming be heard?



Wellness and Safety Bulletins are produced by the Department of Developmental Services to alert direct service providers, regional center staff, and others to specific risks identified with our community.