

Elder Abuse Reporting & Helpful Information

We all have the responsibility to keep our vulnerable aging congregants safe from harm. As clergy and congregational leaders, you may be in a position where you can easily spot the warning signs of elder abuse and make a call for help if the elder is in need of assistance.

The PC(USA) Book of Order has consistent language about the duty to report for clergy, elders and deacons: G-60204b; G-60300b; G-6.0400

A minister of the Word and Sacrament [elder, deacon] shall report to ecclesiastical and civil legal authorities knowledge of harm, or the risk of harm, related to the physical abuse, neglect, and/or sexual molestation or abuse of a minor or an adult who lacks mental capacity when (1) such information is gained outside of a confidential communication as defined in G-6.0204a; or (2) she or he reasonably believes that there is risk of future physical harm or abuse.

Each state sets its own laws regarding the reporting and prosecution of elder abuse. All but five states (New York, New Jersey, Colorado, North Dakota and South Dakota) mandate those that are in the helping professions such as doctors, home health care providers, social workers and clergy to report suspected cases of abuse.

The National Center on Elder Abuse provides more detailed information on specific laws and reporting guidelines for each state at http://www.ncea.aoa.gov/ncearoot/Main_Site/index.aspx or you can call their National Hotline at (800) 677-1116. They also provide a list of reporting numbers by state at:

http://www.ncea.aoa.gov/NCEAroot/Main_Site/Find_Help/State_Resources.aspx

If you know someone who is in immediate, life threatening danger, CALL the POLICE or 911.

Important information to have available before you make the call include:

- Name of Client
- Address
- Date of birth, if available
- Social Security Number, if available
- Type and indicators of suspected abuse
- Whom should initial contact be made through
- Any other pertinent information

Some other actions you may want to take are:

- Document any changes in the well-being of the elderly person.
- If the perpetrator is known to you, document any changes in behavior or unusual behavior.
- Try to find alternative accommodations for the person. Many states provide emergency shelter for the elderly who are abused.

It is always important that the interests of the elderly are your first concern. Respect their right to keep personal information confidential (other than for mandated reporting purposes). Try to use family and informal support systems first unless this interferes with their safety.

The Eldercare Locator:

The Eldercare Locator, public service of the Administration on Aging, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, is a nationwide service that connects older Americans and their caregivers with information on senior services. The Eldercare Locator is designed to help older adults and their families and caregivers find their way through the maze of services for seniors by identifying trustworthy local support resources. The goal is to provide users with the information and resources they need that will help older persons live independently and safely in their homes and communities for as long as possible.

Established in 1991, the Eldercare Locator links those who need assistance with state and local area agencies on aging and community-based organizations that serve older adults and their caregivers. Whether an older person needs help with services such as meals, home care or transportation, or a caregiver needs training and education or a well-deserved break from caregiving responsibilities, the Eldercare Locator is there to point that person in the right direction.

The Eldercare Locator is administered in partnership with the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging and the National Association of State Units on Aging.

Call the Eldercare Locator

Call the Eldercare Locator toll-free at (800) 677-1116, Monday through Friday 9:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. (ET).

For calls after normal hours of operation:

After hours, a message recorder is available for the caller to leave a name and a telephone number. Calls will be returned the next business day.

For TDD/TTY Service:

Access your local relay service or dial “711” for your relay operator. Instruct the Relay Operator to connect you to the Eldercare Locator at (800) 677-1116.

For Non-English or Limited English Speakers:

Full language line service for 150 languages is available when you call the Eldercare Locator.

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Source: National Center on Elder Abuse website (2008)
http://www.ncea.aoa.gov/ncearoot/Main_Site/index.aspx