

Generation to Generation

Safeguarding seniors from abuse

Elder abuse is a far-reaching issue affecting nearly five million Americans each year. It is not always easily identified as many people who commit the abuse are trusted family members, friends, or caretakers. Elder abuse can take many forms, including physical assault, emotional abuse, neglect, or financial exploitation. Would you recognize the signs?

Types of elder abuse

Elder abuse is the mistreatment of older adults in one or more of the following ways:

- **Physical:** Use of force (such as hitting or pushing) causing pain, harm, or physical injury; inappropriate use of medications or physical restraints.
- **Sexual:** Any type of non-consensual sexual contact.
- **Psychological:** Mistreatment that affects emotional or mental health, including intimidation, threats, harassment, humiliation, belittlement, or isolation.
- **Neglect:** Willful deprivation of basic needs, including food, clothing, shelter, medicine, or personal hygiene.
- **Self-neglect:** The inability to provide for one's own physical or psychological needs which causes risk to health or safety.
- **Financial exploitation:** Misuse of the older adult's money, property, or resources.

Warning signs *Is the older adult...?*

- Fearful of caregiver
- Not receiving necessary assistance from caregiver
- Prevented from interacting privately with family, friends, or other professionals
- Crying, agitated, trembling, confused, or in emotional distress
- Withdrawn, depressed, lacking emotion
- Showing signs of self-destructive behavior
- Socially or physically isolated
- Displaying poor hygiene, such as dirty clothing, body odor
- Lacking in basic necessities, or home is in disarray
- Suffering from unexplained bruises, burns, cuts, or welts
- Experiencing unauthorized withdrawal of funds or use of credit cards

What you can do?

If elder abuse is suspected, call **911** or the local Adult Protective Service (APS) office in your community. In Montgomery County, Maryland, call APS at **240.777.3000**. ■

Initiatives

In the Jewish tradition, the fall holiday of Sukkot is marked by constructing temporary structures reminiscent of shelters built in Biblical times to protect farmers harvesting crops in the fields. In this same spirit of providing temporary shelter, Charles E. Smith Life Communities will launch a new program this fall, the ElderSAFE Center, the first program of its kind in the Washington, DC metropolitan area.



The initials SAFE stand for Shelter, Advocacy, Freedom from abuse, and Education. In addition to providing short-term shelter for older adults referred by community agencies, the Center will offer a range of services including:

- Confidential counseling
- Medical services
- Physical and/or psychological therapeutic services
- Case management
- Community referrals and coordination with partner agencies
- Legal referrals
- Spiritual support
- SAFE discharge



*Tovah Kasdin, J.D.
Director, ElderSAFE Center*

The ElderSAFE Center will also work to prevent future abuse by raising awareness, educating our community, and encouraging early intervention. The ElderSAFE Helpline for professionals to call when shelter is warranted is 301.816.5099.

Charles E. Smith Life Communities is grateful to the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Center for Elder Abuse Prevention at the Hebrew Home at Riverdale, New York, for their guidance in establishing this program, and to the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation and Montgomery County, Maryland, for grants to support it.

Tovah Kasdin, J.D., will direct the ElderSAFE Center. An attorney with more than 15 years of experience in domestic violence law, Tovah formerly served as a prosecutor with the Montgomery County State's Attorney's Office handling domestic violence cases. She currently serves as president of the Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence and has testified on domestic violence policy. Tovah has also provided consultation to the World Bank Group, International Monetary Fund and the Inter-American Development Bank on best practices for domestic violence prevention and response. ■