

Signs of Elder Abuse & Neglect

GUIDELINES FOR ANIMAL WELFARE PROFESSIONALS

Signs of abuse or neglect in companion animals may be indicative of self-neglect by an older adult, or of elder abuse or neglect perpetrated by others. If you are visiting a household where an older adult is present and you encounter any of the following, it could be a sign of elder abuse or neglect.* If abuse is disclosed or you observe something that is cause for concern regarding the well-being of an older adult, report this information to law enforcement or adult protective services.

Physical or Sexual Abuse

- Bruising, welts, or signs of restraint
- Bite marks or lacerations
- Clothing or bedding that is torn, stained, or bloody
- Discomfort or fear in the presence of particular people
- Resistance to being touched
- Hidden or seemingly untreated injuries
- Physical signs of being over- or under-medicated (confusion, drowsiness, altered speech, etc.)
- Reports of unexplained changes in mood, behavior, or routines

Neglect (by Caregiver or Self)

- Untreated injuries or health concerns
- Lack of access to prescribed medications, or overuse of medications
- Isolation/lack of access to outside support
- Unsafe or unsanitary living conditions (for people or animals)
- Poor hygiene (soiled or stained clothing, body odor, etc.)

- Shortage of food and other necessities in the home (for people or animals)
- Signs of malnutrition or dehydration (fatigue, confusion, hallowed appearance, etc.)
- Lack of proper pet care (lack of food, untreated injuries, etc.)
- Reports of cognitive changes or decline
- Reports of housing insecurity

Emotional or Psychological Abuse

- Hesitancy or refusal to communicate in the presence of particular people
- Low self-esteem
- Discomfort or fear in the presence of particular people
- Withdrawal or isolation

Financial Abuse

- Inability to explain finances/unexplained loss of funds
- Reports of drastic changes in lifestyle
- Failure to pay for bills and services (including veterinary) despite apparent financial ability

Notes:

*NOTE: This is not an exhaustive list of the signs of elder abuse and neglect; rather, it is intended to highlight the signs animal welfare professionals might be most likely to encounter in the typical course of their work.