

Recognizing and Reporting Abuse of Older LGBTQIA2S+ Adults

Everyone should be able to grow older with respect, stay safe, and get the support they need. Yet many older adults experience abuse, ranging from physical and emotional abuse to financial exploitation and scams, forced isolation or restraint, unwanted sexual contact, and abandonment by a caregiver.

It is even more likely for older adults (over the age of 65) who are LGBTQIA2S+ and/or people living with HIV. A statewide study reinforced that older LGBTQIA2S+ adults who have experienced some form of abuse often don't report it. The risk of getting abused is even higher for older LGBTQIA2S+ adults who are people of color, living with lower incomes and/or living with HIV.

Types of adult abuse

People over the age of 65 who are LGBTQIA2S+ and/or people living with HIV may experience many different types of abuse. Abuse can come from someone they know, like a partner/spouse, family member or caregiver, and it can also come from a stranger.

In Oregon, abuse includes:

Physical abuse: Hurting someone's body, causing pain or injury.

Neglect: Not providing basic needs like food, health care and safety.

Financial exploitation: Taking money, property, medicine or other belongings unfairly.

Verbal or emotional abuse: Using hurtful, threatening words or actions.

Involuntary seclusion: Keeping someone away from others against their wishes, unwanted isolation.

Wrongful restraint: Preventing someone from moving freely, such as locking them in, tying them up or misusing medicine.

Sexual abuse: Unwanted, unwelcomed or offensive sexual acts or words.

Abandonment by a caregiver: Leaving someone alone who needs care.

Self-neglect: When an adult cannot care for or protect themselves.

What to look for

Seeing the signs that an older adult is being abused or having their rights violated can be difficult. Some people may not report abuse because they are afraid, embarrassed, or unable to communicate due to memory loss or other issues. Here are some signs to look for:¹

Physical	Unexplained injuries or physical signs of punishment or restraint, such as bruises, scars or burns.
Emotional	Depression, anxiety or changes in behavior.
Neglect	Preventable health problems such as bedsores, or unclean living conditions.
Abandonment	An older adult who needs help being left alone without planning for their care.
Sexual	Changes in mood, becoming withdrawn or other physical signs.
Financial	Changes in banking or spending patterns.

How to report abuse

While some people are required by law to report suspected abuse (see the section on Mandatory Reporters on page 6), **anyone can and should report abuse** if they think it might be happening. Abuse can be reported

¹ Source: <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/elder-abuse/spotting-signs-elder-abuse>

by the person being abused, by their family or friends, by the people responsible for their care either at home or in a care facility, or by anyone else in a position to observe or suspect it.

If you are being abused or think someone you know is being abused—even if you have questions or doubts—it is always better to report it rather than risk allowing an abusive situation to continue.

➡ **If the person has been injured or is in immediate danger, call 911.**

➡ **If the person is not in immediate danger:**

- **Visit oregon.gov/respect** to learn more and find resources for reporting abuse.
- **Call the Oregon SAFEline at 1-855-503-SAFE (7233).** You may need to leave a message, and someone will call you back.

Protecting your privacy

Some people might be nervous to report abuse, especially if they are LGBTQIA2S+. The fear of being treated differently, confronting homophobia or being discriminated against is very real and can discourage people from reporting abuse.

State law protects your confidentiality and keeps your information private when you report abuse. **You will not be required to share information about your LGBTQIA2S+ identity** as part of making a report or during any investigation of the reported abuse. In fact, you don't have to give your name if you wish to remain anonymous.

If you do identify yourself in making the report, your name and identity will not be shared unless you give permission or if the law requires it (for example, if there is a crime or a judge orders it).

What happens when reporting abuse

When a report is made, your local ODHS or local Adult Protective Services (APS) office that provides services to older adults and people with disabilities will:

- Review your report to decide if an investigation or protective services are needed.
- Tell you how Adult Protective Services will respond to your report and what they will do next.
- Provide help including information and referrals.

If an investigation is needed, an Adult Protective Services investigator will be assigned to the case to find out what happened and whether it was abuse or self-neglect, and work with law enforcement if a potential crime was committed.

Mandatory reporters

Mandatory reporters are people in the community who are required by law to make reports of abuse or neglect to authorities. Examples include but are not limited to doctors, police, clergy members, employees, contractors or volunteers of a nursing facility, home care workers and ODHS employees. For adults living in a nursing facility, their family members, guardians and legal counsel are also considered to be mandatory reporters.

Oregon's adult abuse reporting law protects mandatory reporters. If you report suspected abuse in good faith, you are safe from civil and criminal liability for making a report.

Call the Oregon SAFeline at 1-855-503-SAFE (7233) to make a report.

Additional Support

You can get this document in other languages, large print, braille or any format you prefer. Contact Aging and People with Disabilities at 503-945-5811 or 1-800-282-8096 or email CentralAPS@odhs.oregon.gov. We accept all relay calls, or you can dial 711.

Adult Protective Services are available regardless of income, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, national origin, heritage, immigration or any other status. APS responds to all reports made to local offices about eligible adults who may be experiencing abuse, self-neglect or other safety concerns in Oregon.