

A Caregiver's Guide to Ending Emotional Abuse in Facilities

David moves slowly and is very shaky. He is often the last person to finish his meals, and staff have to wait for him when they try to assist residents to return to their rooms. One nursing assistant, Kim, is usually impatient because she has many other residents she needs to help. "Come ON, David! If you can't move any faster than that, I'm not going to take you to the dining room anymore. You can think about moving faster when you are sitting alone in your room with an empty belly!"

Susan, a resident with dementia who cannot manage her own personal care, often rejects staff efforts to help her. One morning, Susan refuses to brush her teeth—she insisted she'd already brushed them. At the end of her rope, Janice, a certified nursing assistant, snaps, "How would you know if you brushed your teeth?! You are pathetic. You can't remember anything! Just brush your #!% teeth already."

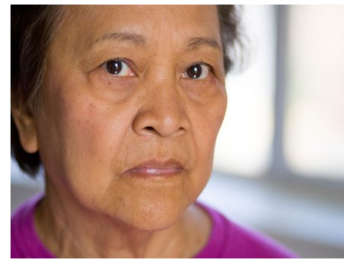
These are common examples of emotional abuse. The National Center on Elder Abuse defines emotional abuse as "Inflicting mental pain, anguish, or distress on an elder person through verbal or nonverbal acts." Examples of abuse include threats, insults, or efforts to isolate or control another person.

While it is easy to think "sticks and stones" are more damaging than words, emotional abuse leaves lasting scars. In fact, emotional abuse causes depression and anxiety and can increase the risk of early death.

After neglect, emotional abuse is the most common type of harm that older people suffer. One study found that 58% of CNAs reported yelling at a resident, while 36% reported insulting or swearing at a resi-

dent. Emotional abuse often happens along with other types of abuse, like neglect and physical abuse.

Emotional abuse occurs for many reasons. When the abuser is a paid caregiver, studies show that stress and job burnout are the leading reasons



the caregivers commit abuse. Also, caregivers who look down on residents or who have been injured by a resident are more likely to abuse residents.

CNAs have a very tough and important job. There are a number of ways to deal with on-the-job stress. For example, it helps to remember that residents who act out are usually not trying to be frustrating or cause trouble.

When you see someone emotionally abusing a resident, you are required to report it just as you would report physical abuse. But your role doesn't end there! Victims of emotional abuse may isolate themselves or withdraw from activities. Your support can help them with healing, and watchful eyes can prevent further abuse. You can also provide support to staff you think are under a lot of stress. Reaching out to them might give them a chance to blow off steam or ask for help instead of lashing out at a resident.

"The greatest weapon against stress is our ability to choose one thought over the other."

- William James

Tips to Lower Stress



Breathe. Many times, there is no time to walk away from a stressful situation. When this happens, try the 4-7-8 Breath. Exhale completely. Inhale through your nose for a count of 4. Hold for 7. Exhale through your mouth for a count of 8. Repeat 3 times for a 60 second stress breaker (search 4-7-8 Breath at drweil.com to learn more).

Reflect. Thinking about why a situation is stressful can point to a solution. Ask yourself, “Do I feel ready to do the tasks being asked of me?” If a resident is frustrating you, “what is causing this behavior? What can I do differently as I work with this resident?” If this a new behavior, “Is the resident ill?” A small change may improve the situation.

Ask for Help. Letting your supervisor and co-workers know about a stressful situation may alert them to problems they did not know about and help them adjust staffing, change assignments, show they appreciate your efforts, and address your concerns.

Recover. What you do outside of work can impact stress levels during a shift. Exercising, getting enough sleep, good nutrition, and maintaining supportive relationships can lower stress.

For More Information

EVE (End Violent Encounters): 1-517-372-3911

Adult Protective Services: 1-855-444-3911

Tri-County Office on Aging: 1-800-405-9141

Long Term Care Ombudsman: 1-517-394-3027

How do you handle stress? **Tell us your success stories via email at: ssteinke@meji.org.** We would love to share them in future newsletters.



To Report Elder Abuse

Of a Nursing Home Resident by a staff member:
State of Michigan (LARA): 1-800-882-6006

Of an older adult living at home, in assisted living, adult foster care, home for the aged, or a Nursing Home Resident being abused by a visitor:
DHHS/Adult Protective Services: 1-855-444-3911

If you think a crime has occurred:
Your local police/sheriff department (and LARA)

If the danger is immediate: 911

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The Newsletter is available electronically and in hard copy. Contact ssteinke@meji.org to subscribe.

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