



The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Center  
for Elder Abuse Prevention

at the Hebrew Home at Riverdale



For more information about the Guardian-ad-litem  
Elder Abuse Specialist program, contact [Deirdre.lok@hebrewhome.org](mailto:Deirdre.lok@hebrewhome.org)  
or Denise Colon-Greenaway at [dcgreena@nycourts.gov](mailto:dcgreena@nycourts.gov).



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We are pioneers of safe shelter for elder abuse victims.  
It is our mission to champion justice and dignity for older adults.



Our mission is to ensure access to justice in civil and criminal matters  
for New Yorkers of all incomes, backgrounds and special needs, by using  
every resource, including self-help services, pro bono programs, and  
technological tools, and by securing stable and adequate non-profit and  
government funding for civil and criminal legal services programs.

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# Elder Abuse and Guardians-ad-litem

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Hebrew Home at Riverdale



### **What is elder abuse?**

Elder abuse is an intentional act or failure to act by a caregiver or another person in a relationship involving an expectation of trust that causes or creates a risk of harm to an older adult.<sup>1</sup>

### **How do you know if your ward is a victim of elder abuse?**

- Ward is not allowed to speak to you alone
- Social and physical isolation, e.g. the family member or caregiver restricts the ward's contact with others
- Suspicious or pattern of injuries
- Implausible or inconsistent explanation of injury, financial status, or condition of home
- Poor hygiene
- Lack of necessary assistive devices or supportive care
- Expressions of fear: agitation, trembling, nervousness, crying, withdrawn
- Sudden change in financial management
- Trust your instincts if you are concerned

### **Should I raise the subject of elder abuse with my ward? How?**

Yes. Speak to your ward privately, away from friends, relatives or caregivers who may be present in the home or courtroom. Attempt to make the ward comfortable. Try to ensure that your ward has the appropriate glasses, hearing aids or other assistive devices needed to participate fully in a conversation, as sensory impairments can often be a barrier to meaningful dialogue. Ask questions about the aspects of the ward's situation that are troubling to you, beginning with less invasive, less threatening topics and language. For example, you may consider using the term "mistreatment" instead of "abuse." Your ward may react with some degree of anger, shame or denial. If more intensive support or resources are needed, please contact a Guardian-ad-litem Elder Abuse Specialist.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Center for Disease Control, Elder Abuse Surveillance: Uniform Definitions and Recommended Core Data Elements, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Guardian-ad-litem Elder Abuse Specialists are designated individuals who received additional training and certification in elder abuse prevention and intervention. To learn more about the program contact Deirdre.lok@hebrewhome.org or Denise Colon-Greenaway at dcgreena@nycourts.gov.

### **Should I share my concerns with the Court? How?**

Yes. Wards who are in immediate danger need to be referred to law enforcement or directed to a hospital for a medical assessment. It is appropriate to share with the Court language to the effect of: "Due to safety concerns in the home, my ward was directed to seek assistance from the police or sent to the hospital for emergency medical intervention." In non-emergency or uncertain abusive circumstances, it is prudent to utilize court staff. Share general concerns with the court or staff attorney for the presiding judge, or make a record that there are safety concerns. Ask to approach the bench or for counsel to be assigned if you believe the ward is being abused. The court has the authority to make a referral to Adult Protective Services to investigate and question the parties. Abusers use tactics to control their victim that can include glaring, verbal threats of nursing home placement, unwanted physical contact, and disregard for the older adult's presence or statements. It is your obligation to be aware of what is going on and to make sure that your ward's interests are represented. The court can order a perpetrator out of the courtroom, and all abusive behaviors should be noted on the record. Ask the court to have the court officers assist and protect your ward when necessary. If appropriate, inform the court that you will be reaching out to a Guardian-ad-litem Elder Abuse Specialist.

### **How can I ensure my ward's safety once we leave the courthouse?**

If in crisis, assure your ward that calling 911 is appropriate. Provide direct resources to your ward. Write down names and phone numbers of people the ward can contact for support. There are a wide variety of local resources. Eyes and ears in the home, in any form, are critical. Ultimately, the balance between the right of the ward to make independent decisions and the ward's cognitive ability to do so can be a fine line. Involve other professionals when in doubt. To refer your ward for emergency shelter at the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Center for Elder Abuse Prevention, call 1-800-56-SENIOR (567-3646).