

FAITH INVOLVEMENT

in World Elder Abuse Awareness Day



WORLD ELDER ABUSE AWARENESS DAY

Building Strong Support for Elders

June 15th

Many religious organizations prosper from the wisdom and participation of older adults. Older people are actively involved in or contacted regularly by religious congregations more than any other demographic group. As a member of a faith community, whether you are a congregant or a religious leader, you may be in a unique position to observe signs of elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Promoting the just treatment of our neighbors from loss or pain is a mitzvah, a good deed, or a spiritual duty. In addition, reporting elder abuse is an ethical, and in many states, a legal responsibility.

What is World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD)?

World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD) is a call-to-action for individuals, organizations, and communities to raise awareness about the abuse, neglect, and exploitation of older members of our community. The International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse and the World Health Organization at the United Nations (UN) launched the first World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD) on June 15, 2006 in an effort to unite communities around the world in raising awareness about elder abuse. WEAAD is in support of the UN's International Plan of Action acknowledging the significance of elder abuse as a public health and human rights issue.

For a comprehensive WEAAD Toolkit including a guide to hosting awareness events, visit <http://eldermistreatment.usc.edu/weaad-home>.

Why Does WEAAD Matter?

Everyone deserves to feel safe, but there are a startling number of older adults who experience or remain at risk for abuse. Every year an estimated 5 million, or 1 in 10, older Americans experience elder abuse, neglect, or exploitation. However, experts believe that for every case of elder abuse or neglect reported, as many as 23.5 cases go unreported. **WEAAD** is a great opportunity to enhance understanding about elder abuse and encourage communities to promote justice as we age.

What is This Year's WEAAD Theme?

Building Strong Support for Elders

What is Elder Abuse?

Elder abuse refers to intentional or negligent acts by a “trusted” individual that causes (or potentially causes) harm to an older individual. The most common categories of abuse are:

- Neglect
- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Financial abuse and exploitation
- Emotional or psychological abuse (including verbal abuse and threats)

Each state defines elder abuse differently (You may wish to look up how your state defines abuse in your state’s statutes. For assistance, contact the NCEA). For more information on elder abuse, visit <https://ncea.acl.gov/About-Us/What-We-Do/Research.aspx>.

Why Does Elder Abuse Occur?

A combination of psychological, social, and economic factors, along with the mental and physical conditions of the person experiencing abuse and/or the perpetrator, contribute to the occurrence of elder maltreatment. Though more research on elder abuse is needed, risk factors may include:

- Social isolation
- Lack of access to support and resources such as health and human services etc.
- Functional, mental, financial, or emotional dependence
- Substance misuse and/or mental health issues

What Can We Do?

We can all take action. Our society is like a structure. Just like a structure needs sturdy and frequently maintained beams to hold it up, so do we. In partnership with other community members, faithful people who take action can be a beam of support in our society. We can provide protective supports like community services that facilitate social interaction for people of all ages, trainings that raise awareness and understanding of elder abuse, as well as informed advocacy on how we can prevent and address elder abuse with locally elected leaders.

Social cohesion as well as increased education and conversations about elder abuse can encourage understanding of elder abuse risk factors and interventions. Constructing these types of support can start on World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD) and continue throughout the year. Together, faith-based communities and all of us can promote justice across age groups, abilities and capacities.

EASY WAYS TO ENGAGE:

1. Host an elder abuse awareness training for your congregation.
2. Shape a children’s lesson around the just treatment of people no matter their age. Help kids understand that belonging to a community means that we all watch out for and care for each other.
3. One of the leading risk factors of elder abuse is social isolation. To prevent isolation and empower communities of all ages, organize a friendly visit or letter-writing program with the members of your community who are isolated, living alone, or live in a long-term care setting.
4. Engage with others on social media by using our sample posts for Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.
5. Turn your Facebook photo purple on June 15th to inspire dialogue within your social network.
6. Print WEAAD Posters and share them in high traffic areas at your place of worship.
7. Include our sample blurb about WEAAD in your faith community newsletters, blogs, or other outreach materials.

Lastly, consider why promoting the just treatment and empowerment of older people is a part of your faith's practice. Use this as a basis for starting conversations about elder abuse with your congregants and others. The National Center on Elder Abuse (NCEA) offers WEAAD tools to help your outreach at <http://eldermistreatment.usc.edu/weaad-home>.

What action do you plan to take?

Go online and tell us what you are doing! Sign up your organization to be a WEAAD collaborator at <https://eldermistreatment.usc.edu/weaad-home/events>.

Sample Outreach Statement

“Join us on June 15th in commemorating World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD). This international holiday provides an opportunity for our community to live the principles of our faith. Today, take the time to understand the risk factors of elder abuse and learn what we can all do to prevent and address it. Participate in our event [list any WEAAD activities your faith community is hosting]. Learn more about elder abuse and WEAAD here: <http://eldermistreatment.usc.edu/weaad-home>.”

Sample Sermon Starter

“Every year 5 million older adults, or 1 in 10, are being abused, neglected, and exploited right here in the United States. How can this be? How can a nation that believes in justice for all leave us at risk for mistreatment as we age? We have forgotten our role within our community. It is easy to wear one's faith as window dressing, a way to be identified as part of a group, or respected amongst our peers. A strong community is one that puts faith into action. Honoring, respecting, loving, and caring for members of our community regardless of age are all ways to put our faith into action.”

Other Elder Abuse Resources and Initiatives for Faith Communities

- [Eldercare Locator](#) is a nationwide service that connects older Americans and their caregivers with trustworthy local support resources.
- [Sacred Spaces](#) builds healthy Jewish communities by partnering with Jewish institutions to prevent and respond to sexual abuse and other abuses of power.
- [Safe Havens Interfaith Partnership Against Domestic Violence and Elder Abuse](#) is an interfaith organization that promotes hope and justice for victims and survivors of domestic violence, sexual violence and elder abuse.
- The [NCEA Faith Communities Webpage](#) lists NCEA elder abuse resources for faith communities.
- [Raising Awareness of Abuse of Older Persons – An Issue for Faith Communities?](#) discusses a study undertaken in Ontario, Canada to determine the awareness level that faith leaders possess about elder abuse.
- [The Imam and Chaplain Toolkit](#) guides conversations about coping, counseling, boundaries, and culturally appropriate interventions for Muslim faith leaders.