

Aging Happens: Making use of Adult Protective Services, Part 2

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In my last column (Nov. 9, "Adult Protective Services plays a vital role"), you read about the important role that Adult Protective Services (APS) plays in our community. Here are the remaining set questions and responses APS provided.

What are some other ways APS assists older adults and their families?

APS not only provides investigations, but also interventions to end or lessen abuse. Examples include calling in emergency services, advocacy and information for individuals who want elder and disability persons restraining orders, assistance finding medical, legal or community services, and connecting with bill-paying services. It is important to understand that APS provides voluntary interventions. They work with adults, who have the right to make their own decisions, and unless there is court order, must follow the older adult's wishes. Here are some of the resources APS can connect older adults and their families to:

- The Aging and Disability Resource Connection (ADRC) of Oregon (www.ADRCofofOregon.org; 541-618-7572) provides free services such as: information and assistance on public and private services and programs, health and wellness, benefits counseling, long-term care options counseling and assistance.
- "Homecare Choice, Your Connection to Care" for access to safe, trained caregivers and personalized help (www.homecare-choice.oregon.gov; 844-494-4227)

Is it possible to call APS and ask for a "well-visit"?

In many situations, APS does not have authority to go to homes until a report of abuse has been made or an investigation has been opened. Once screened in, APS will commence a full investigation. So, APS relies on sources such as law enforcement to provide safety in certain situations for individuals who live in their own homes in the community. For individuals who live in facilities or licensed settings, call APS or community partners such as the Long-Term Care Ombudsman (800-522-2602).

When should people call APS and what help will they receive?

We can only respond to abuse that we know of and need the public to assist us. Responding quickly and thoroughly to abuse reports is not only critical, but helps ensure the safety and long term health of vulnerable Oregonians. When you report abuse, here is what you can expect:

- If you wish to remain anonymous, tell the person on the phone right away. Once you give your name, you are no longer anonymous. However, your identity will be kept confidential. It can only be disclosed with your permission, by court order, or under laws such in reporting a crime.
- The person will ask what you know about the abuse and how to find the alleged victim and the abuser. The screener will want to know how to contact you, unless you have chosen to be

anonymous. If you report in good faith, you will have immunity from liability which means you cannot be held legally responsible for reporting.

- As the person reporting the abuse, you may know if it was investigated and if was substantiated or not. However, due to confidentiality, they cannot give details about the abuse investigation.

What else is important for people to know?

Educate yourself with what you can do to help APS keep older adults safe:

- Be aware of the possibility of abuse. Look around and take note of what may be happening with your older neighbors and acquaintances. Do they seem to be withdrawn, nervous, fearful or sad around certain people when they have not responded this way in the past?
- Report your concerns. Most cases of adult abuse go undetected. You do not need to prove abuse is occurring as this will be determined by the investigator. Simply report your suspicions even if you are not sure.
- Whether you or someone you know are living at home or in a licensed care setting, obtaining and utilizing a lock box, safe, or locked medication dispenser will go a long way toward preventing the theft of pills, debit/credit cards, cash and other items.
- Keep in contact. Talk with your older friends, neighbors and relatives. Maintaining communication will help decrease isolation, a risk factor for abuse. It will also give the older adult a chance to discuss any problems they are experiencing.
- Help an older adult. Contact a local program for sources of support such as home-delivered meals, the local senior center or long-term care ombudsman. All of these programs are good lines of defense against abuse and many can provide services that help maintain health, independence and safety and offer excellent volunteer opportunities for you.

With all this great advice and the support service of APS, it's still up to us to keep our eyes open and report anything that seems suspect or unusual. Here's their contact info again: 541-776-6231.

Unfortunately, abuse happens, but we can all help ourselves and older residents by following their important advice.