

People Living with Dementia are at Risk for Abuse

Older adults who live alone, are socially isolated, or who are in fragile health may be more susceptible to experiencing abuse. A person living with dementia can be especially vulnerable to someone who takes advantage of them. Members of the faith-based community can help by being alert to indicators of abuse or neglect (listed below):

Indicators of Abuse or Neglect

- Physical injury, such as bruises, burns, skin tears, or broken bones
- Appearance of being malnourished or dehydrated, or unusual weight loss
- Poor hygiene
- Symptoms of anxiety, depression, or confusion
- Care partner shows anger or indifference toward the person with dementia
- Hesitation to talk openly in the presence of a care partner
- Conflicting explanations of incidents by the family or caregivers
- Clothing that is inappropriate for the weather, dirty/torn, or ill-fitting
- Strained or tense relationships or frequent arguments between the care partner and person with dementia
- Unexplained withdrawal from activities

How to Help

Faith communities and places of worship can help those living with dementia by implementing dementia-friendly practices and by reporting suspected elder or dependent abuse to **Adult Protective Services (APS)**.

APS is a program administered by Aging & Independence Services (AIS), a division of the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency.

APS serves older adults age 60 and older, as well as dependent adults age 18-59, who are being harmed, or threatened with harm, to ensure their right to safety and dignity.

Contact APS (**see below**) if you observe, suspect, or have knowledge of physical abuse, financial abuse, abduction, isolation, abandonment, neglect by others, or self-neglect. Anyone can report suspected abuse, not just legally mandated reporters.

Make a Report

Call AIS at (800) 339-4661

Any person can make a report through the 24-hour reporting line for suspected elder/dependent adult abuse. You can call anonymously, or your identity can be held in confidence.

To learn more, visit:

- **Aging & Independence Services**
(www.aging.sandiegocounty.gov)
- **National Center on Elder Abuse**
(www.ncea.acl.gov)



Dementia-Friendly Tips and Elder Abuse Prevention for Faith-Based Communities

For more resources and information on programs for older adults, visit www.aging.sandiegocounty.gov or call (800) 339-4661.

Faith-based communities and organizations can provide important spiritual respite. As **welcoming, compassionate environments**, they offer people affected by dementia opportunities for **meaningful engagement and spiritual connection**. Through dementia-friendly practices, entire faith communities can uplift people with dementia and their care partners.



10 Warning Signs & Symptoms of Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias (ADRD)

1. Memory loss that disrupts daily life
2. Difficulty planning or solving problems
3. Forgetting how to do familiar tasks
4. Confusion with dates, time, or place
5. Trouble with spatial relationships
6. New problems with words in speaking or writing
7. Misplacing objects and the inability to retrace steps
8. Altered decision making and poor judgment
9. Withdrawal from work or social situations
10. Mood swings and changes in personality

Dementia-Friendly Communication Skills

- Greet people warmly even if you think they do not remember you. If they seem confused, offer a reminder.
- Slow your pace slightly and allow time for person to process and respond.
- Speak clearly and calmly; be patient.
- Keep communication simple; ask one question at a time.
Listen with empathy and seek to understand the person's feelings.
- Connect on an emotional level even if the conversation topics shift.
- Be aware of body language; smile, make eye contact at eye level.
- Offer hugs, hand holding as appropriate.
- Treat the person with dignity and respect.

Making Your Faith-Based Community Dementia-Friendly

- Encourage the use of name tags.
- Be positive and focus on strengths and abilities rather than limitations.
- Be sensitive to difficult behaviors, such as talking, calling out, or walking during services.
- Provide an environment that is safe and accessible with quiet places to sit and relax, well-lit hallways, uncluttered spaces, and pictures and signs that identify areas, such as the restroom.
- Share materials and information on dementia, brain health, and clinical trial opportunities in newsletters.
- Invite a person living with dementia or a caregiver to share their experience living with the disease.
- Offer to help a person get ready for worship services or assist with transportation.
- Offer live-stream service options for those who find it difficult to attend in person.
- Start a support or prayer group for people living with dementia and their caregivers.
- Speak and share materials about Alzheimer's disease and related dementias, brain health, and clinical trial opportunities.

