

## Warning Signs Of Financial Elder Abuse: A Checklist For Families

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With people living longer and many elders developing dementia, the prevalence of elder abuse is becoming more visible than ever. Cognitive decline and financial abuse can go together, because impaired elders are so vulnerable. Families need to know the warning signs so they can take action before it's too late.

Here are some common warning signs of potential or actual financial abuse you may spot with an aging loved one. Take them seriously:

1. **Isolation of the elder** by a family member, caregiver or other who may be motivated to take money from them. Access to the elder is blocked unless the suspected abuser is present.
2. **Abrupt, unexplained changes to estate documents**, such as Durable Power of Attorney, will or trust. This may come as a result of manipulation of the elder by an abuser.
3. **Sudden change of address** without explanation or apparent need. An abuser may have gotten control over an elder's residence and sold it or moved the elder to an unknown location.
4. **Inability to contact the elder by phone, mail or email**. An abusive person can cut off contact with concerned family or others, so as to keep the financial abuse secret.
5. **Appearance of a new "friend"** in the elder's life, causing concern about the "friend's" sudden interest in the elder's finances. This can be a caregiver, distant relative, romantic interest or other who is in position to manipulate the elder into giving him or her money.
6. **Addiction to a relationship on the internet**. This is particularly dangerous for elders who are lonely and live alone but it can happen to anyone. The elder is contacted by a scammer daily or multiple times a day, all for the purpose of taking the elder's money. The elder enjoys the contact and has no suspicions about it.
7. **Unusual account withdrawals or changes in spending habits**. A normally frugal person sends money to strangers, questionable causes, or fake "charities" without regard to whether he or she can afford this.
8. **Requests of the elder to borrow money from you**. This can indicate that a scammer has wiped out a bank account or otherwise caused the elder to run out of funds.
9. **The elder admits to credit cards being maxed out**. This can also indicate that someone has persuaded the elder to give access to credit cards to an unscrupulous person or abuser known to the elder, such as a family member.
10. **The elder reveals odd-sounding plans for travel with a suspicious person**. This can be a manipulator's tactic for having a great time at the elder's expense. Cruises, trips abroad and any arduous travel unsuitable for the elder should raise suspicions about manipulation by another.

When you see any of these warning signs it is important to delve into what you see right away. Here are eight actions you can and should take.

1. **Investigate.**
2. **Ask questions.**
3. **Go see for yourself.**
4. **Confer with other family about your concerns.**
5. **Get online access to your loved one's bank accounts and monitor activity daily.**
6. **Confront the suspicious person and let him or her know that you are watching.**
7. **Consult an elder law attorney.**
8. **Fight back: you are not powerless!**

**Educate your clients! Families can help you protect vulnerable elders. Questions?  
Contact us at [AgingInvestor.com](http://AgingInvestor.com) 844-315-4464 or [drmikol@aginginvestor.com](mailto:drmikol@aginginvestor.com)**