



Special coronavirus considerations for older survivors

Coronavirus (COVID-19) has caused a major disruption in daily life around the globe, and it's especially unsettling for those at a higher risk for complications, particularly anyone aged 65-years-old or older. Among elders, there are those experiencing domestic violence as well, and for them, the situation is even more complex and dangerous.

The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) says older adults and anyone with severe underlying medical conditions -- like lung and heart disease, diabetes, or a compromised immune system -- are at a heightened risk of developing more serious complications if they contract coronavirus. While everyone is encouraged to stay home and practice good hygiene to lower the risk of getting sick, it's especially important for these high-risk populations. Elders can experience challenges connected to this isolation though, like if they depend on a meal delivery service that has now changed its delivery schedule. Even an elder who is healthy and not dependent on social services or caregivers can be negatively impacted emotionally by the reduced opportunity to see friends and family.

Beyond this, someone who is older and also experiencing domestic violence can be dealing with a range of abusive tactics, in addition to the threat or use of violence. This can include the abuser restricting contact from friends and family, taking money from the survivor or limiting their access to bank accounts, withholding or manipulating the survivor's daily medicines, and much more. If the survivor is dependent on the abuser as a caretaker, the abuser may intentionally not provide the level of care needed. If the survivor is a caretaker for someone, like grandchildren, the abuser could threaten to harm those dependents.

Unfortunately, there are even more abusive tactics faced by older survivors, specifically around coronavirus.

For example, coronavirus can be especially challenging for nursing homes or long-term care facilities because they specifically serve this high-risk population. If a survivor of domestic violence is living with her/his abuser, that abuser could threaten to send the survivor to a nursing home or long-term care facility -- which could make the survivor especially fearful for her/his health, in addition to any other concerns or resistance to living in a facility. While Medicare says [testing and other facets of care connected to coronavirus are covered](#), an abuser can lie to a survivor about the cost and accessibility of treatment. The abuser can also be the only source of virus-related information the survivor receives, and the abuser may manipulate that information to instill fear about the survivor's health and the health of loved ones.

Hubbard House encourages survivors of domestic violence of all ages to make a safety plan, which accounts for how they can stay safe during explosive incidents in the

relationship, or if they decide to leave the relationship. Hubbard House has trained advocates available around the clock to help survivors create these safety plans. You can reach Hubbard House through our Hotline at (904)354-3114 or Textline (904)210-3698 for free and confidential guidance.

Older adults are also encouraged to make a medical care plan, especially because of the additional complications that come with coronavirus. The CDC offers [guidance for what this care plan should involve](#), including basic information like emergency contacts and a list of medicines the survivor is taking. That plan can also include some coronavirus-specific information, like what the survivor will do if a non-abusive caretaker or someone who supports them contracts coronavirus.

The medical care plan and safety plan may overlap in some areas, like in considering how a survivor can secure access to their medication. It's important that both plans are revisited and updated to reflect any changing conditions. A survivor can also consider whether it is safe and beneficial to sign up for any special needs registry that their city or county hosts. Survivors can register for the [Jacksonville Special Medical Needs Registry](#) and [Baker County Special Needs Registry](#) online.

Hubbard House services are provided to all survivors of domestic violence, regardless of age and accommodations needed. Survivors who are caretakers for young children or adult dependents – which could include an older parent, grandchild, or others – can bring those dependents with them, if the survivor needs to enter emergency shelter. In addition, the Hubbard House shelter also allows non-abusive personal care attendants or caregivers of elders and persons with a disability to come with the survivor. Hubbard House also offers outreach services, court advocacy, and more in support of survivors. To speak with an advocate and explore these life-saving and life-changing services, you can contact the Hubbard House Hotline at (904)354-3114 or Textline (904)210-3698 for free and confidential guidance.

For caretakers and supporters

For loved ones of someone who is older and experiencing domestic violence, Hubbard House encourages you to maintain communication with that survivor, to the extent s/he believes it is safe. Consider different ways of communicating, in order to use a medium that is comfortable for your loved ones – for example, let them decide if they prefer talking on the phone, texting, video chatting, etc. Please be mindful that an abuser could have access to communication devices, and [consider tech safety precautions](#).

You can also try to support any basic needs your loved ones may not have fulfilled as a result of the virus or abuse. For example, consider if you can help them order or obtain groceries, prescription medication, and medicine to treat common symptoms like fevers. Understand, though, that if the abuser is withholding these supplies as a tool of abuse, then you need to more carefully coordinate with the survivor whether s/he believes it is safe for you to provide that support.

As someone who supports an older survivor, it's also important to watch for signs of additional distress dealing with the survivor's mental and emotional health. A survivor may feel guilt that s/he is putting you at risk of the virus because of your help running errands, or s/he may fear for their health or the health of loved ones. This may show through behavior changes like irritability, loss of interest, or other signs. The CDC says that [elders are at a greater risk of depression](#), but are often misdiagnosed or undertreated, in part because older adults may not recognize the signs as different from the effects of aging. Fear about coronavirus and the co-occurrence of domestic violence can heighten these feelings even further. Encourage the survivor to focus on self-care in ways that are safe in their situation, and let the survivor know that when they're ready, you're there to provide support and help connect them with any resources they may want.

You may also consider whether you should report the abuse to the Florida Abuse Hotline at 1-800-962-2873. Florida law requires the reporting of abuse, neglect, and exploitation of vulnerable adults, which can include elders, depending on their condition and circumstances. Someone experiencing abuse may be considered vulnerable if their ability to care for themselves and perform normal activities is impaired by age or disability.

Being there for older survivors as a support will let the survivor know you are a source of help and hope for them, as they continue to assess what's best and safest for her/his current situation. And for survivors, Hubbard House will continue to be a source of help and hope as well. We are here for you, when you are ready.