



Center for Elders and the Courts  
[www.eldersandcourts.org](http://www.eldersandcourts.org)



# Elder Abuse & Neglect

## Module Two: Identifying Elder Abuse & Neglect

The National Center for State Courts developed this curriculum in collaboration with the Center of Excellence on Elder Abuse and Neglect at the University of California, Irvine School of Medicine with support from the Retirement Research Foundation of Chicago (grant number 2008-056).



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# Module Two Goal

Judicial officers will learn how to recognize elder abuse and neglect in a variety of court settings.



# Module Two Objectives

At the conclusion of Module Two, judges should be knowledgeable about

- ü General definitions of elder abuse, neglect, & exploitation
- ü State laws relevant to elder abuse
- ü Prevalence & incidence of elder abuse
- ü “Red flags” suggestive of elder abuse
- ü Capacity, consent, & undue influence



# General Definition

“Elder abuse” is a term referring to any knowing, intentional, or negligent act by a caregiver or any other person that causes harm or a serious risk of harm to a vulnerable adult.

# Types of Elder Abuse



Physical Abuse



Emotional Abuse



Sexual Abuse



Exploitation



Neglect



Abandonment



# Elder Justice Act (EJA)

- EJA (S. 795) included in the health care reform bill, H.R. 3590 (signed into law in 2010)
  - Elder Justice Coordinating Council
  - Advisory Board on Elder Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation
  - Funding for:
    - Adult Protective Services
    - Forensic Centers
    - Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program

# Relevant State Statutes

- Each state has an adult protective services law with definitions and may have other relevant civil or criminal laws.
- [Insert relevant state statutes; to be completed by state judicial educator]

# Estimates of Prevalence

- Prevalence data on elder abuse is problematic
  - Different definitions, under-reporting, lack of reliable national data collection methods, research study limitations
- Estimates from the 2009 Elder Mistreatment Study:
  - 11 percent reported at least one form of mistreatment (excluding financial abuse) in the previous year (3.6 million)
  - 5 percent reported that they were being currently financially exploited by a family member (1.7 million)
  - Caveats
    - Study used a broad category of “mistreatment” and is based on self reports of persons aged 60 to 84. The study excluded those aged 85 and older and those with dementia, who are particularly vulnerable to abuse and neglect

# Elder Abuse Incidence

FOR EVERY REPORT OF ABUSE....



5 GO UNREPORTED

# Elder Abuse Factors



# Caregiver Stress

- Caregiver stress can be an underlying factor
- Stress does not justify neglect or abusive behavior



# Recognizing Abuse and Neglect

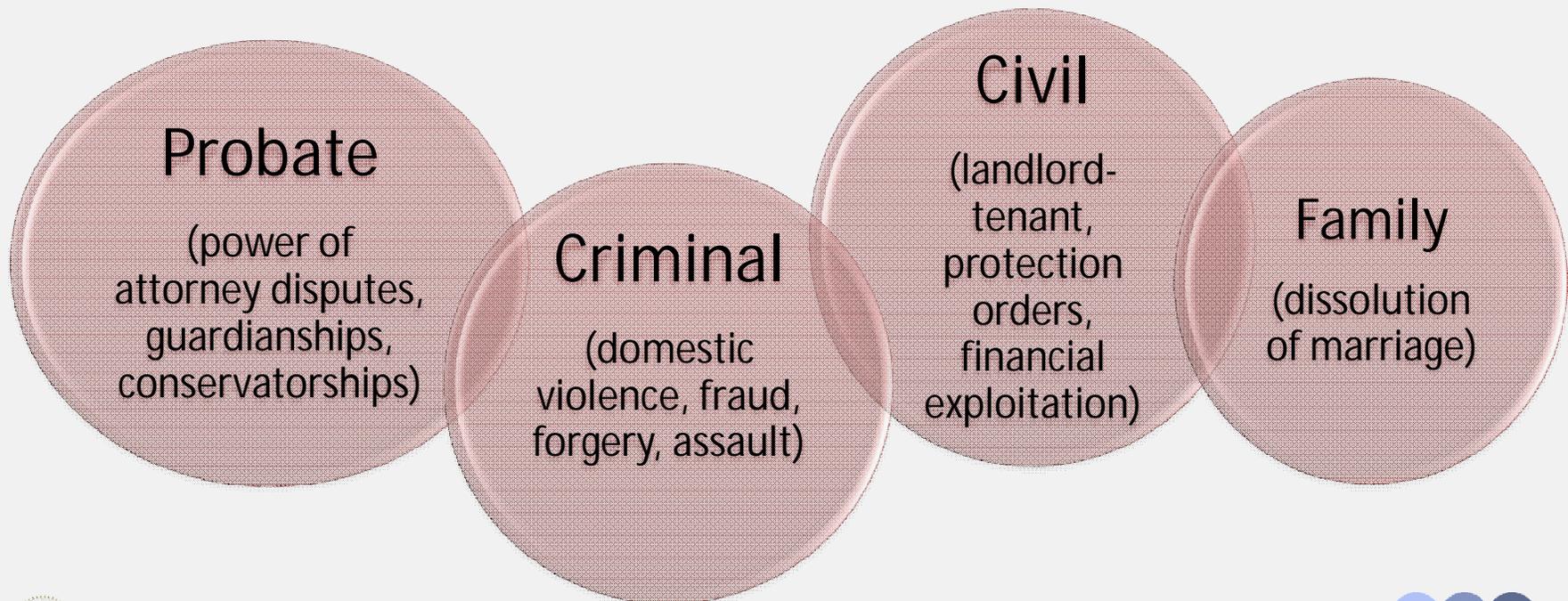
Elder abuse and neglect are hidden problems.



*How will you  
recognize elder  
abuse?*

# The Hidden Nature of Abuse

Elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation may be an underlying factor in a variety of court cases involving older persons.



# "Red Flags"

## Physical/Sexual Abuse

Slap marks

Unexplained fractures

**Bruises,  
welts, cuts,  
sores, or  
burns**

Nonconsensual sexual conduct

# Physical Abuse: Bruising

Defenses	Research Findings	 CENTER OF EXCELLENCE ON ELDER ABUSE AND NEGLECT UNIVERSITY of CALIFORNIA, IRVINE
<p>Older people just bruise easily. There's no way to distinguish if the bruise was accidental or inflicted.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 90% of accidental bruises were on the extremities; whereas bruises caused by abuse tended to be located on the torso, neck, or head.</li><li>• 90% of older adults with bruises who have been physically abused can tell you how they got their bruises, and this includes many older adults with memory problems and dementia.</li><li>• Bruises indicative of abuse tend to be large (about 2 inches in diameter or larger).</li></ul>	
<p>The color of the bruise indicates it occurred at a time when the defendant was not in contact with the victim.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In older persons, the color of a bruise does not indicate its age.</li></ul>	
<p>The bruise was caused by medications taken by the victim.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Older adults taking medications that interfere with coagulation pathways were more likely to have multiple bruises, but the bruises did not last any longer than the bruises of those who didn't take these medications.</li></ul>	

# "Red Flags"

## Emotional Abuse

Withdrawal from  
normal activities

Unexplained  
changes in alertness  
or other unusual  
behavioral changes

**Aggressive  
or  
controlling  
relationship**

# Domestic Violence in Later Life

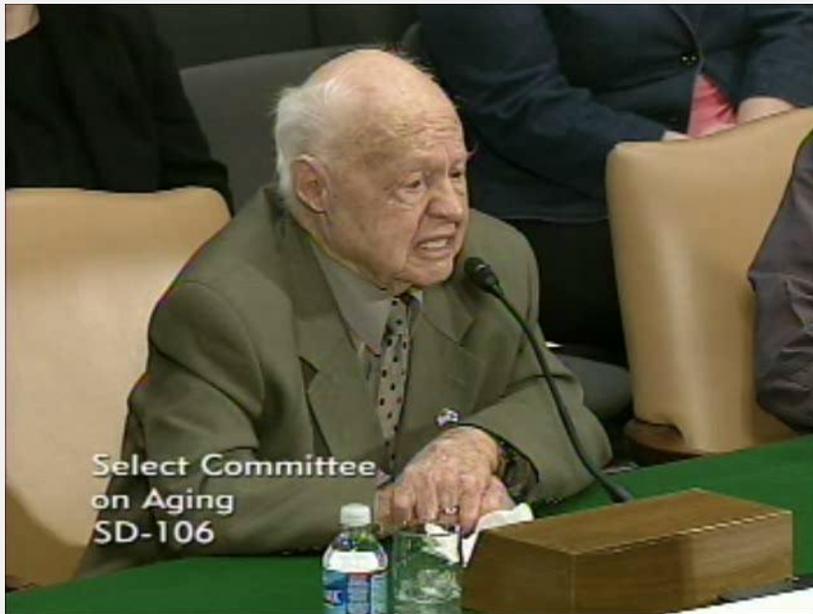
A person uses power and control to injure or harm an older person with whom they have an ongoing relationship

Typical abusers  
spouses, former spouses, partners, adult children, extended family, caretakers

Abusers use a pattern of coercive tactics, such as isolation, threats, intimidation, and violence to gain and maintain power over their victims

# Emotional Abuse

## Mickey Rooney Testifies about Elder Abuse



- Often accompanied by physical abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation
- Creates an environment of “shame” and helplessness that plays a role in the hidden nature of abuse
- Can be gradual or sudden

# "Red Flags"

## Neglect

Lack of  
basic  
hygiene

Lack of  
medical  
aids (e.g.,  
glasses, walker,  
hearing aid,  
medication)

**Incapacitated  
person  
without care**

Pressure  
ulcers  
("bedsores")

Malnutrition  
or  
dehydration

# Elder Neglect

## The Case of Christopher Wise



Joey Anchondo / The Seattle Times

- Neglect versus honoring victim's wishes
  - Victim's cognitive impairment and history of seeking medical care must be considered
  - Defendant may have ulterior motives (e.g., relying on victim's social security checks)
- Ability to provide adequate care may be an issue

# "Red Flags"

## Financial Exploitation

Sudden change in finances and accounts (including unusual withdrawals)

**Altered wills and trusts**

Checks written as "loans" or "gifts"

Loss of property

Improper use/forgery of power of attorney

# Financial Exploitation

## The Case of Philanthropist Brooke Astor



- Financial exploitation alleged to be most common form of abuse
- Exploitation occurs within the family (children, grandchildren, and relatives)
- Defenses often based on the defendants' perceptions that they are entitled to funds or acting in victim's best interest

# What do these cases have in common?



None of the cases came before the court identified as “elder abuse.”

# Key Legal Concepts

Capacity

Consent

Undue Influence

# Capacity

Capacity is the cluster of mental skills that people use in everyday life. It fluctuates over time, situations & tasks.

memory

logic

behavioral  
functioning

physical  
functioning

**Capacity**

# Legal Aspects of Capacity

Standards of capacity vary for different types of transactions.  
For example:

Testamentary capacity: at the time of executing a will, the person has the capacity to know the natural objects of his/her her bounty, to know the nature and extent of his/her property, and to integrate this knowledge to make a rational plan for disposing of the property.

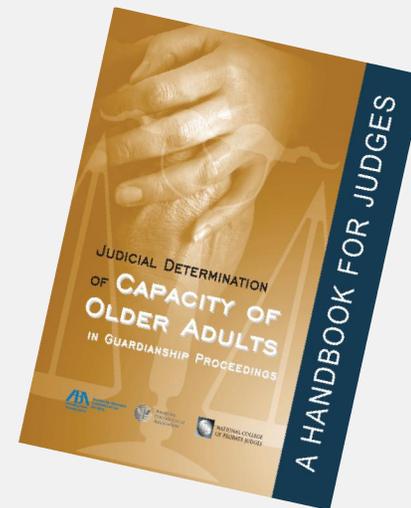
Contractual capacity: the person can understand the nature and effect of making a contract and the business being transacted (less complicated transaction requires lower level of understanding)

# Legal Aspects of Capacity

Determining capacity in older adults can be very difficult and often requires gathering information from many sources.

Examples include:

- üFamily members
- üMedical care professionals
  - üPhysician
  - üGeriatrician
  - üNeurologist
- üMental health care professionals
  - üGeriatric Psychiatrist or Psychologist
  - üForensic Psychiatrist or Psychologist
- üAdult protective services workers



# Consent

Consent requires an individual to be able to:

Understand the transaction or activity

Make judgments about it

Decide if it is something he or she chooses to do

Consent is a significant factor in determining the legitimacy of a wide range of actions.

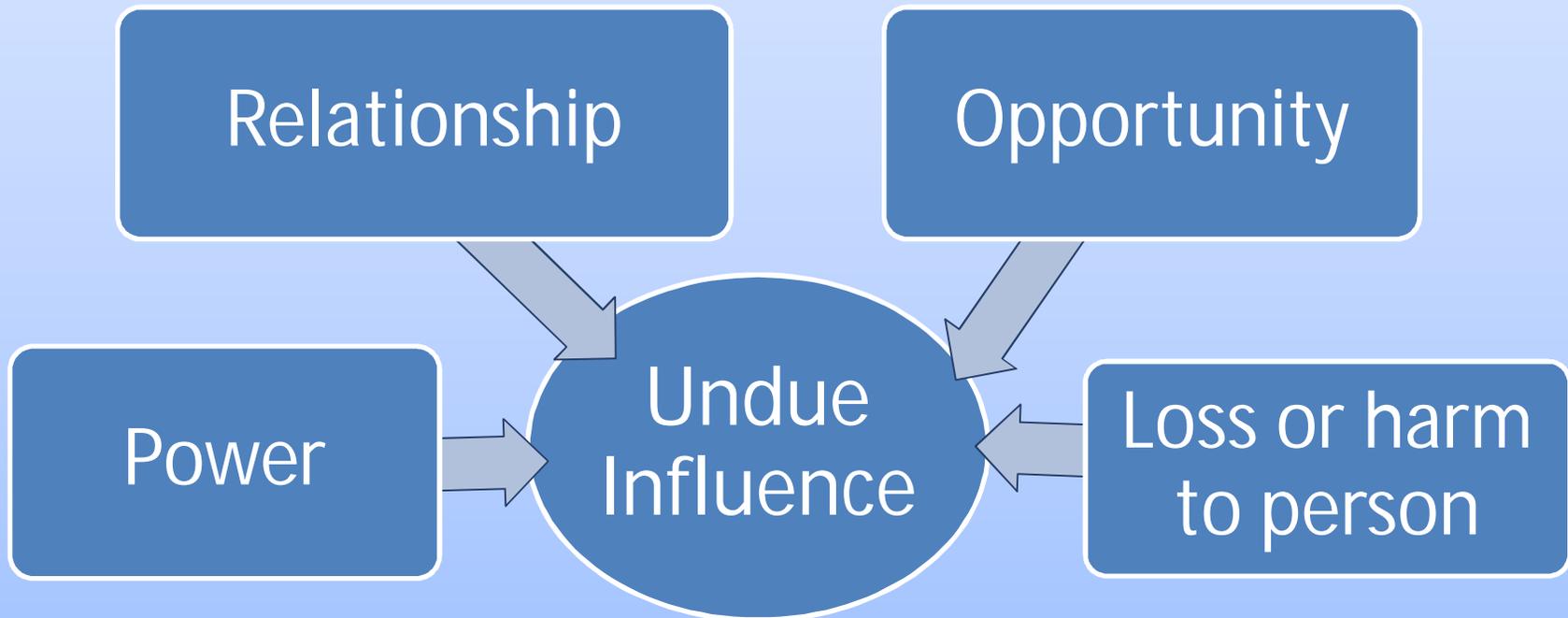
An issue in determining whether a crime has been committed (especially intimate crimes)

An important issue in legal transactions

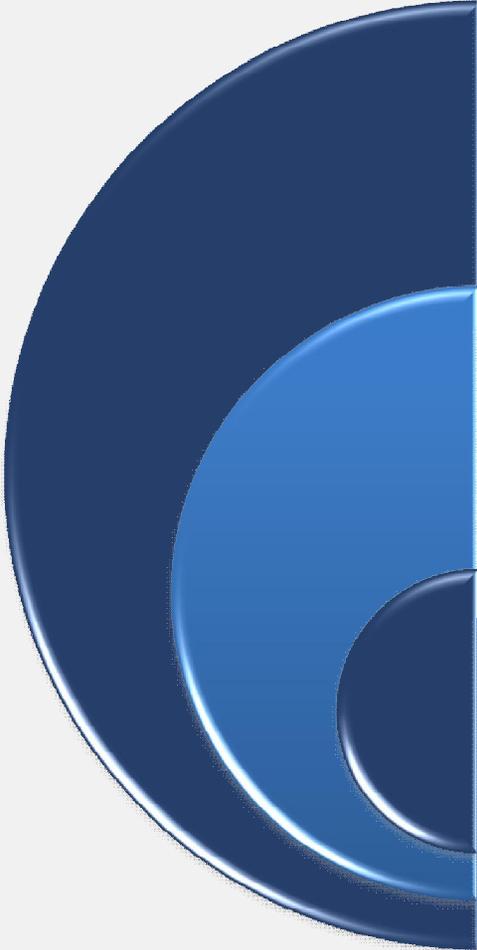
A fundamental issue for APS (capacity to consent)

# Undue Influence

Undue influence is the misuse of one's role and power to exploit the trust, dependence, and/or fear of another to deceptively gain control over that person's decision making or assets.



# Undue Influence



Undue influence typically is not a crime; rather it is a means to commit a crime, such as exploitation and other forms of financial abuse.

Undue influence often is alleged in disputes over the validity of wills, conveyances of property, contracts and powers of attorney.

Undue influence is a factor in decisions about the need to protect a person through guardianship and/or conservatorship.

# Implications for the Court

- The identification of elder abuse can be difficult.
- Elder abuse may be an underlying factor in a variety of court cases involving older persons.
- Transactions involving older persons may need additional scrutiny.
- More cases will involve complex issues of capacity and consent.

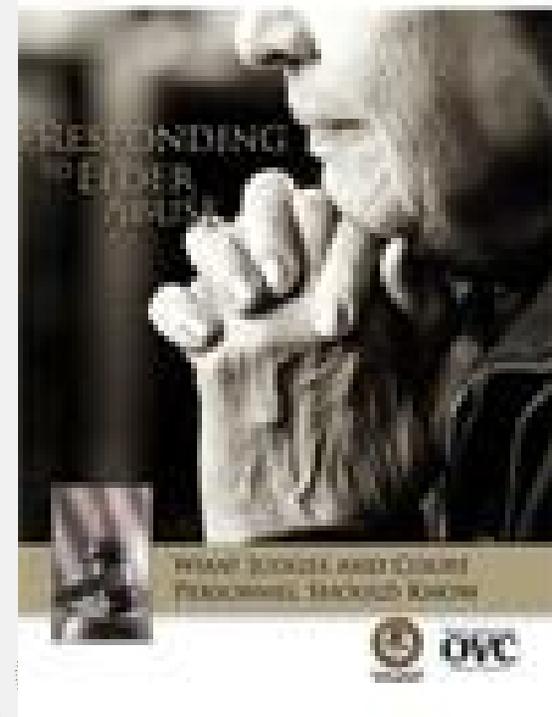




## *DVD Presentation*

# Responding to Elder Abuse

What Judges and Court  
Personnel Should Know



# Additional Resources

Visit the National Center for State Courts'  
Center for Elders and the Courts at

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