

Sample Elder Abuse Speech

Are you one of those people who avoid talking about certain subjects?

Most of us are.

We start to fidget. Try to change the subject. Who will win the pennant?

Is the weather changing?

You know – keep it light, avoid the tough stuff.

But we can't. And I won't
...because elder abuse cannot be ignored.

It goes on in every state, every town, and every neighborhood.

The composite image in this crime is a family member mistreating a vulnerable elderly woman. No wonder we turn away: it is not a pretty picture.

In Illinois last year, more than 7,000 older adults experienced abuse, often at the hand of their loved ones, the people they trust most in the world.

And, it is generally agreed, this is a serious underestimate of the problem.

Experts say that there are at least 10 cases of elder abuse for every one that is reported.

One of the reasons that elder abuse is under-reported is because victims are often afraid of retaliation,
...because each victim is typically dependent upon the abuser.

At the end of life, at a time when elders should be receiving gratitude and support for the contributions they have made to their families and their communities, the typical victim of elder abuse is cowering alone, afraid to disclose the shame and disgrace of the abuse and fearful that speaking out will cause the fist to come down even harder.

Another cause of the under-reporting of this crime lies with us, the public.

We cannot believe it. We cannot accept it. And so – too many of us turn away.

In so doing, we are turning away from our responsibility as members of our communities.

We are turning away from the debt we owe our elders.

In turning away, we are rejecting the values taught to us by our elders,
...the very values that define us.

We must open our eyes and face the facts.

Three-fourths of the victims of elder abuse in Illinois are women.

Their average age is 79.

About 75 percent of the victims of elder abuse are functionally impaired – either physically or mentally.

Four in five abusers are family members. Most are substance abusers.

Some snapped under the stress of caregiving, unaware that help is available.

Elder abuse, the mistreatment of an older person, takes many forms.

Abuse can come in the form of physical and emotional abuse, financial exploitation or neglect.

But whatever the form, elder abuse hurts — physically, mentally and socially.

Clearly, this is a harm from which there is little hope of recovery.

If there ever was an example of the need for responsible citizen action, this is it. If you suspect elder abuse, in any of its forms, please report your suspicions about this often devastating situation.

Our state offers protection to the reporter, as well as to the victim. And, Illinois promises tough action against perpetrators if a crime occurs.

In Illinois, the law defines criminal neglect as acts that cause injury or deterioration of health; and it may be treated as a Class 3 felony.

The law defines abuse to mean neglect, physical, mental or sexual injury or financial exploitation to an adult 60 or older if an older person is unable to report for himself or herself. It mandates reporting of suspected abuse by service providers in an extensive list of fields, including social service, law enforcement, public service and medicine, including paramedics and emergency medical technicians.

Further, our state mandates an aggressive training program about elder abuse to public and private agencies that may encounter abuse and exploitation of older people in the state.

And it requires the State to get the word out, using signs in banks and other financial institutions and notices to older people about their rights in the face of fraud and financial exploitation.

Further, our elder-abuse law prevents people who are convicted of elder abuse from receiving any property or benefit after the death of the victim.

This applies to anyone, family member or con artist, and to financial institutions as well.

Illinois law also gets tough, requiring action against physicians, dentists and other mandated reporters of abuse who fail to notify authorities when abuse is suspected.

Residents of long-term care facilities are also protected by law against abuse and criminal neglect by the owner or an employee of the facility.

So there you have it.

There is a problem; but if we open our eyes to this crime
and report suspicious activity,
the laws in our state
and the agencies that serve the elderly
will act.

Please help us. Let's "break the silence."

We cannot ignore this travesty.

The tragedy of elder abuse is a reflection upon all of us
and the values that define us.

Thank you.