Caring for Elders: Watching for signs of abuse

K-State specialist encourages those who engage with older adults to be on the lookout for mistreatment

By Lisa Moser, K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. — Sitting at youth events alongside grandparents can often lead to joyful conversations.

And as people engage with members of that generation, it is important to be listening and observing possible signs of mistreatment, said Erin Yelland Kansas State University specialist and interim director of the Center on Aging.

“Ten percent of Americans over the age of 60 have experienced some form of elder abuse in the last year and many researchers expect this number to rise with the growth of the aging population,” Yelland said. “For the first time in human history, we are going to have the population of older adults outnumber children in the U.S.”

Because of this shift in balance, Yelland said there are going to be fewer caregivers to look after the older generation, and that is a risk factor for elder abuse.

“Caregivers, family members (including the adult children and their spouses) are 90% of the people who are most likely to perpetrate elder abuse, and so oftentimes it is someone on the outside who will see the warning signs,” Yelland said.

She said the six common categories of abuse are:

- Physical.
- Emotional/Psychological.
- Sexual.
- Neglect.
- Abandonment.
- Financial/Exploitation.
While anyone can be a victim of elder abuse, Yelland said it is most often seen in those who are female, very elderly, socially isolated, mentally impaired or a prior victim of abuse.

“Unfortunately, older adults are often hesitant to report this because it is oftentimes someone in their family and they don’t want to get that person in trouble,” Yelland said. “So, when you are interacting with older adults, it is important to keep an eye out and report anything that seems not quite right.”

Yelland stressed the importance of elders in society. “Older adults are such an incredible value to a community with their wealth of knowledge and experience, and with longer lifespans, we have the opportunity to enjoy our time with them by fostering those connections.”

For more information on how to spot the signs of elder abuse and how to report it, turn to the K-State extension bulletin — Elder Abuse and Neglect: What You Should Know.

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FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story

K-State College of Health and Human Sciences, https://www.hhs.k-state.edu


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