

Working to prosecute cases of child and elder abuse

April is Child Abuse Month and that's good but what about elder abuse? I strongly recommend that both of these facts-of-life realities be combined into Child Abuse/Elder Abuse Month. There has always been abuse. The older generations knew that but they kept their mouths shut.

There is no excuse for abuse regardless of age, race, economic condition, mental capacity or gender. And educating the public is the key that unlocks the possibility of reducing – if not completely eliminating – abuse. It is a mistake to think of physical abuse as the only kind of abuse. Other kinds are psychological abuse, emotional abuse, financial exploitation and self-neglect.

We should suspect psychological and/or emotional abuse when an elderly person appears confused or disoriented. Fearful victims don't talk freely or answer questions. Withdrawal and depression are also signs that something is wrong.

Financial exploitation is another form of abuse. Often the abuser will isolate the victim from friends and family members in order to have control over the victim's finances. That is exactly what a Kokomo man discovered recently.

This distressed gentleman found out that an abusive relative tricked their elderly relative into signing everything over to her. The proper signature on each legal paper made this man and all the other family members powerless to change that exploitive situation. "Sorry, there's nothing we can do" was the only possible reply to this man who sought help.

Unusual activity in bank accounts and recent changes in a will or power of attorney by an elderly

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person incapable of making such decisions should be a "red flag." And an important "red flag" question is, Does the person lack personal grooming items, decent clothes and other things the person should be able to afford?

Self-neglect falls into the category of abuse when people are unable to care for themselves despite their protest to the contrary.

Signs of self-neglect abuse: if the person is unable to manage their finances, and activities of daily living such as personal care, meal preparation and housework. Also, is the person suicidal, refusing medical treatment or cutting off contact with family and friends?

Did you know that each year there are over 40,000 cases of elder abuse and neglect in Indiana? Would you believe that only one in 14 cases is ever reported to authorities? And abuse often occurs at the hands of family members.

The good news is there are Adult Protective Services (APS) available on the state level and locally. On the state level there is Patrick Calkins, APS Program Coordinator for the State of Indiana. Calkins, a retired Indiana State Police is dedicated to the protection of elderly adults and adults over 18 years old who can't help themselves.

The Adult Protective Services Program began quietly in Indiana in 1985 but it's now becoming a "hot topic." In the last three years

there has been significant progress, says Calkins. This year's budget is \$2.2 million.

In Indiana the criminal justice system is working to prosecute abuse cases. This includes white collar financial abuse cases. Only the state of Indiana has this broad coverage of elder abuse protection, so other states are interested in using Indiana's APS program as their model.

Unfortunately, there are only 42 investigators statewide and the case load is an incredible 1,205 cases with 18 geographical divisions. The investigators are usually retired law enforcement officers. "They deserve a pat on the back," said Calkins, including Logansport's investigators-Jerry Stoner and Michael Morphet.

Stoner and Morphet have a huge area to cover: Cass, Fulton, Howard, Miami, Tipton and Wabash Counties, but they operate out of Logansport.

I thank Patrick Calkins for his timely, helpful information on this very important issue. The State's toll free abuse hotline number is 1-800-992-5808. My thanks to Jerry Stoner and Michael Morphet for information they supplied me in the form of a brochure from Kevin S, Enyeart, Cass County Prosecutor.

The brochure begins with a "Message from the Prosecutor." Enyeart writes, "Suspected abuse and neglect should always be reported to the Logansport Police Department, Cass County Sheriff's Department, Cass County Prosecutor's Office or directly to the State's toll free abuse hotline."

He continued, "Don't look the other way or make excuses. If you suspect something is wrong, it probably is. Your call could save the life of a friend or loved one."