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FREE FAMILY CAREGIVER RESOURCE

Family Caregiver's Guide to Nursing Home Safety Warning Signs & What to Do Next

If someone you love lives in a nursing home or rehabilitation facility, your visits and questions can make a meaningful difference. Use this guide to spot changes, ask informed questions, and keep useful records.

Four Warning Signs Worth a Closer Look

Changes in health, appearance, or behavior deserve attention. Ask what happened and how staff responded.

01 Bedsores or unexplained bruises
New pressure injuries, recurring skin breakdown, or bruises without a clear explanation. Ask when they appeared and what treatment was provided.

02 Weight loss or dehydration
Unexpected weight changes, poor appetite, dry mouth, or difficulty getting drinks. Ask about weight trends, hydration support, and medical causes.

03 Repeated falls or injuries
Multiple falls, missing mobility aids, or unclear incident reports. Ask about risk assessments, supervision, and care-plan changes.

04 Fear or withdrawal
Sudden fear, isolation, agitation, or reluctance to speak around certain staff. Ask privately and gently whether the resident feels safe.

Other Concerns to Notice

Changes in daily care, communication, or personal safety can reveal problems that are easy to overlook. Notice patterns, ask staff for explanations, and document anything that remains unresolved.

- Poor hygiene or soiled bedding
- Missed care or medication
- Unexpected financial changes
- Unanswered call lights
- Untreated pain
- Restricted family contact

Remember: A warning sign is not proof of abuse or neglect. Illness, medication, mobility limitations, and other factors can contribute. Ask how the concern is being assessed, documented, and addressed.

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What to Do Next

A practical response plan when something does not seem right.

01 Check immediate safety

Call 911 for immediate danger or a medical emergency. Seek prompt medical care for serious injuries or sudden deterioration.

02 Listen privately

Ask open-ended questions: “How are you feeling?” “Do you feel safe?” Avoid suggesting answers.

03 Document the facts

Write dates, times, exact statements, staff names, and what you saw. Preserve relevant records and messages.

04 Request a care-plan review

Speak with the nurse or administrator. Ask what happened, who assessed it, and when you will receive an update.

05 Escalate serious concerns

Contact the Long-Term Care Ombudsman or appropriate state agency. Report urgent suspected crimes to law enforcement.

06 Consider legal guidance

When harm is suspected, an attorney can discuss possible options and evidence preservation. No outcome is guaranteed.

Questions to Ask the Facility

Asking questions helps you understand changes in care, identify missing information, and make sure concerns are addressed. Here are some examples:

- Who assessed the injury or change?
- What has changed in the care plan?
- What is the next step, and when will I hear back?

Helpful Resources

These independent resources can help you compare facilities, understand resident rights, and find local assistance.

Long-Term Care Ombudsman • Medicare Care Compare

Reporting contacts and requirements vary by state. You do not have to wait for a facility investigation to finish before reporting a serious concern.

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Nursing Home & Rehab Visit Checklist

Check each item that looks right. Anything you leave unchecked is something to ask about.

Resident: _____ Facility: _____

Visit date/time: _____ Unit / room: _____

Resident well-being and care

- ☐ Comfortable, alert, and able to communicate as usual
- ☐ No unexplained new bruises, wounds, or pressure sores
- ☐ Eating adequately; no concerning weight change
- ☐ Water within reach and help available to drink
- ☐ Clean clothing, skin, bedding, and living space
- ☐ Turned, bathed, and helped to the bathroom on schedule
- ☐ Pain and symptoms addressed; medications and care discussed
- ☐ Mobility aids and call button accessible
- ☐ No new or repeated falls without clear follow-up
- ☐ Feels safe; no unusual fear or withdrawal around staff
- ☐ Staff speak to residents respectfully
- ☐ Personal belongings and finances appear secure
- ☐ Care plan, therapy, and family updates are clear

Questions and observations

What changed since my last visit?

_____

_____

_____

Who did I speak with, and what did they say?

_____

_____

_____

What needs follow-up, by whom, and by when?

_____

_____

_____

Reported to: _____ Follow-up date: _____

Immediate danger? Call 911. Serious concerns can be reported to the state agency or Long-Term Care Ombudsman.

Concerned about a loved one's care? Free consultation: 1-800-529-3476

www.1800lawfirm.com/nursing-home-abuse/

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