

# How Do Vulnerable Adults Fit into My Ministry?

**Definition of Vulnerable Adult** Any person in a state of infirmity, physical or mental deficiency, or deprivation of personal liberty which, in fact, even occasionally, limits their ability to understand or to want to otherwise resist the offense.

*-VOS ESTIS LUX MUNDI*

Vulnerable adults should be protected from abuse and neglect, which includes physical/emotional injury, abandonment, intimidation/bullying, sexual abuse, or other physical/mental abuse or exploitation.

A vulnerable adult may be suffering from a loss or chronic illness that is not easily recognized, such as:

- Loss of a family member or pet
- Divorce
- Chronic disease/illness
- Uncertain resources
- Unexpected trauma or illness
- Lack of a support system or neglect (including self-neglect)
- Physical or sexual abuse
- Psychological or social harassment and discrimination
- Fraud, identity theft, embezzlement, or other financial exploitation

## **Why do vulnerable adults need extra consideration?**

Vulnerable adults need extra consideration because they are experiencing a difficulty that makes them more susceptible to abuse and manipulation. These individuals may not be able to comfortably or safely access the resources they need, making them an *at-risk* population.

## **Do I need special training to work with vulnerable adults?**

In the Diocese of Salina, the training entails, Safe Environment training for anyone working with children and vulnerable adults, a background check, and review and acknowledgement of the Policy and Code of Conduct.

## **What should I look for?**

Abuse comes in many forms; some indicators are below:

- Physical Abuse*
  - o History of unexplained falls
  - o Multiple accounts of minor injuries
  - o Unexplained bruising or injury
  - o Reluctance to seek medical attention
  - o Malnutrition, bed sores, being left in soiled clothing
  
- Sexual Abuse*
  - o Unexplained changes in behavior
  - o Tendency to spend time secluded
  - o Language that is out of character
  - o Expressed explicit sexual behavior
  - o Torn or stained clothing

- *Psychological Abuse*
  - Tendency to spend long hours in bed
  - Overeating or loss of appetite
  - Anxiety, confusion, or general resignation
  - Fearfulness
    - Does not want to be around a certain person
  - Uncooperative or aggressive
  
- *Financial Abuse*
  - Unexplained inability to pay for shopping or bills
  - Personal possessions going missing from the home
  - Substandard living conditions
    - No or limited access to personal financial information
  
- *Neglect and Acts of Omission (i.e., by family/friend/caregiver)*
  - Medical and physical needs are unmet
  - Proper medication, equipment, or personal care needs unmet
  - Privacy and dignity needs unmet

### **What can I do to help?**

The Catholic Church recognizes that there are many people who require special care and attention. Church personnel, including priests, religious staff and volunteers can carry out their ministry and continue to respect those individuals with vulnerabilities.

- + Recognize when adults may be at risk of harm (warning signs or significant events).
- + Create an environment that is safe and follow Arch/Diocese best practices.
- + Uphold safe recruitment and selection practices for all Church personnel, including volunteers.
- + Maintain high ethical standards of conduct which set clear guidelines regarding behaviors, and perceived behaviors.
- + Avoid situations that compromise your relationship with vulnerable adults.
- + Treat everyone equally and with respect.
- + Respond and report ANY concerns, suspicions, allegations or abuse to the proper individuals, or if you have any questions contact:

**Maria Cheney, LSCSW**  
**866-752-8855 #1067**  
**reportandprotect.com**

***Know your diocesan policies before participating in any events that involve children, teens, or vulnerable adults.***