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June 2018 Newsletter



5 Ways to Help Protect Your Loved Ones from Elder Abuse

On June 15th, citizens worldwide will commemorate World Elder Abuse Awareness Day to help bring awareness to the millions of older adults subject to elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation each year. According to the Department of Health and Human Services, 2.1 million older Americans are mistreated annually. Unfortunately, experts agree that this statistic is low and that for every case of elder abuse reported, as many as five more remain unreported.

How do you protect yourself and your loved ones from becoming the next victim? What preventative steps can you take to ensure that you and your loved ones are as insulated as possible from threats? Let us share with you several steps that you can take to help protect your loved ones from elder abuse.

1. Be proactive.

Even if you or your senior loved one is in good health, being prepared for an emergency or healthcare crisis is critical. This means choosing to make your legal choices as soon as possible. By establishing an agent through planning tools such as the Durable Power of Attorney, you and your senior loved one are proactively deciding who will have the legal authority should a time come when you are incapacitated. These crucial legal decisions can help protect your loved one's person and assets from predators.

2. Stay informed.

Make a point to visit your loved one often. By keeping in regular contact, you will recognize changes in behavior and have an opportunity to step in and take over affairs if necessary. Be involved, ask direct questions, and pay attention. Asking simple questions may reveal underlying issues (Continued on Page 2)

(Contd. from Page 1) and provide your loved one with a safe outlet to express his or her concerns. Do not avoid asking these questions when there is a family caregiver involved. Although it can be hard to believe that neglect could originate with a loved one, ask questions about family caregivers who are involved in assisting your senior loved one.

3. Learn the signs.

Elder abuse typically begins with isolation. Whether your loved one lives alone, has a caregiver in the home, or lives in a long-term facility, it is crucial to have access to him or her at any time of day or night. Not being allowed to meet with your loved one alone, unexplained signs of injury, or your loved one being taken to multiple medical facilities for treatment are all key indicators that may signal elder abuse is occurring. Keep in mind that abuse is not always physical. Neglect, emotional abuse, and financial exploitation are all forms of elder abuse.

4. Check-in regularly, even from afar.

If you live in a different state from your loved one, you may not be immediately available to address any sudden changes in his or her health or daily needs. Many long-distance caregivers seek help from geriatric case managers to oversee the day-to-day financial and medical concerns of their loved ones. Establishing a local support system is crucial. Recruit the help of local neighbors, family, and friends to check in on your loved one every day or two. If the time comes that a caring neighbor isn't enough, you may wish to consider long-term care options to ensure your loved one is receiving more assistance than can reasonably be provided at home.

5. Know when to take further action.

Remember, at all times we are a resource for you. Further, if you suspect your loved one is in immediate danger, don't hesitate to contact the authorities. If you don't believe the danger is immediate but suspect abuse is occurring, voice your concerns to adult protective services, the state ombudsman, or involve the local police department. When it comes to protecting your loved one, no measure is too extreme.

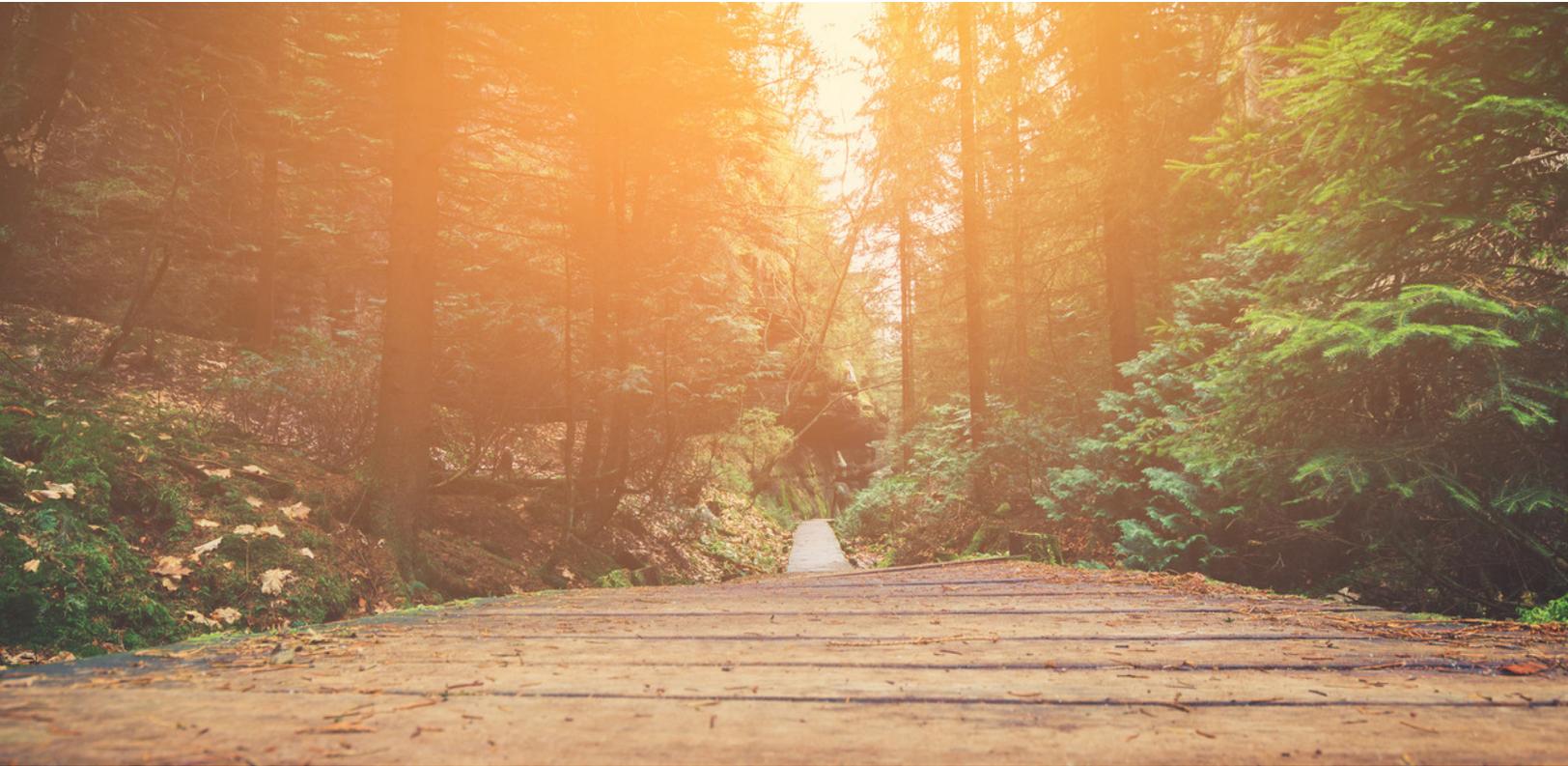
These are just a few of the ways that elder abuse can impact you or your loved ones. Do not wait to be proactive and take steps to protect yourself and those you love. If this article raises more questions than it answers, do not wait to call our office and schedule a meeting with Attorney Alan Hougum.

Revocable Trusts Can Protect Against Estate Challenges by Avoiding Probate

There is nothing more valuable than peace of mind when entering your later years of life. Part of this peace of mind originates in knowing that your hard-earned life savings, property and investments will seamlessly transition to your family and named beneficiaries according to your wishes at the time of your passing.

Unfortunately, a legal challenge from a disgruntled family member or greedy beneficiary could be devastating for the rest of your family at a time when they will be coping with your loss. It's best to plan now. You can take proactive steps to ensure your estate is protected from challenges, or contestability, through proper estate planning tools. In fact, a Revocable Trust could well be the solution.

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(Contd. from Page 2) A Revocable Trust, or Living Trust, is a legal agreement that places assets of your choosing into a “trust” during your lifetime. When you are no longer here, a hand-picked trustee of your choosing will hold and manage trust assets for the benefit of your family and beneficiaries. The ultimate goal is that these assets will be transferred to your intended heirs according to your instructions at the appropriate time after your death.

Revocable Trust planning presents a number of advantages in Wisconsin. Perhaps, the most significant is the avoidance of probate court. Probate is the court-supervised process of distributing assets contained in a Last Will and Testament after any creditors are paid. Under probate law, wills can be contested by spouses, children and other parties.

Another significant consideration and potential downside of probate is a loss of control. Since a judge, attorneys, and the probate court system are all involved, you can lose control. The risk of an unfavorable legal decision and emotional distress for your family increases without your guidance.

Further, you lose your privacy. Since probate proceedings are public record, anyone can search probate proceedings and learn more about your private affairs which, in turn, can provide fodder for legal disputes.

Many families also contend with sensitive familial dynamics. Surviving heirs may deal with medical conditions, disabilities, or struggle with alcohol and drug addiction. Even if such scenarios are understood within the family, it’s not worth subjecting them to public scrutiny. The Revocable Trust is a starting place to create a trust-based estate plan that will ensure your family is provided for in the long-term.

When you engage in trust-based estate planning, you are in control. There may be certain items to settle after your passing, but your family will be provided for under your wishes. Revocable Trust remain a legal planning technique that is more difficult to challenge in general. If this article raises more questions than it answers for you or you wish to explore what trust-based estate planning may do for you and your family, do not wait to contact our office.



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Attorney Alan Hougum and his compassionate team will help you protect yourself and the people you love with strategic planning strategies, such as wills, asset protection and trusts, powers of attorney, estate trusts, elder law planning, Medicaid crisis planning, Medicaid eligibility and application, probate and estate administration, avoiding probate, charitable planning and giving, special needs, and estate tax planning. Hougum Law Firm, LLC, serves the entire Wausau, Wisconsin area.

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305 S. 18th Avenue, Suite 200, Wausau, Wisconsin 54401. Do you have questions you need answered before or after your appointment? Just let us know! Contact us by email at info@hougumlaw.com or call us at 715-843-5001.