

## ELDER ABUSE

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My friend's mother passed away at home recently. Now this is not one of those tales of a senior citizen beaten or hurt or injured by a her home health care givers. This story presents a different kind of horror, one of theft.

There are many ways to cheat the elderly, and some are legend. There's the young woman who pretends a romantic interest to obtain an older man's home and money; older homeowners ripped off by home-improvement con men; and elderly people who may sign papers without understanding them, permitting his or her bank account to be emptied by a new "friend."

Many of these crimes go unreported.

In the case of my good friend's mother, she was robbed, pure and simple. She was cleaned out. All her jewelry taken. Even stolen was a bottle of perfume that my friend had bought his mother for Christmas.

Was she robbed before she died, or after she was taken to the hospital where she quickly passed away? More than one care giver had her keys, and that presented a problem. Unless caught red-handed, these crimes are near impossible to solve.

My friend's mother had lovely jewelry, and she even had a safe. But she was old and her hands unsteady and vision poor, so she couldn't be bothered putting away her valuables and taking them out to wear. She was unwilling to give them to her children to safeguard because, well, these were her possessions and she wanted them and their memories around her, even though her daughter and granddaughter lived nearby and visited her almost daily.

So what to do? How do we protect senior citizens or the vulnerable from abuse and theft?

If you hire a home health aide through an agency, make sure it conducts background checks of its employees. If you hire privately, there are ways to conduct your own criminal background check - just look in the telephone book.

One can install video cameras in the house with an Internet feed to watch that the older loved one is not abused or robbed. But people tend to keep their valuables in their bedroom, and no older person trying to live at home to retain their independence is likely to consent to that level of invasion of privacy.

There is no simple answer, except, perhaps, increased vigilance.

For more information, contact the New York State Office for the Aging Senior Citizen's Help Line at 1-800-342-9871 or go to its website: [www.aging.ny.gov](http://www.aging.ny.gov)

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