



# Suicide In Later Life

## Thoughts of suicide are usually associated with feelings of:

- hopelessness
- worthlessness
- being a burden to others
- loneliness
- emotional, mental, or physical pain
- guilt
- disinterest in activities
- disinterest in people
- helplessness
- despair

**Medications, certain illnesses, and common late-life stressors may raise the risk of suicidal thoughts.**

It is natural to experience despair and have thoughts about your own mortality. But sometimes mental, emotional, and physical pain become so deep and overwhelming that death begins to seem like a compelling escape. If you or someone you know feels suicidal, do not ignore the signs or give up. There are numerous ways to address deep pain, relieve distress, and get on a path to feeling better.

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## If you are having thoughts of suicide or feelings of distress:

Know that you are not alone. Your life matters and people care about how you are feeling. As hard as it may seem, reaching out to talk to someone can bring great relief. Here are some things to try:

- Contact a trusted friend or family member with whom you can honestly and openly share your thoughts and feelings. Ask for their support and let them help you.
- Talk to your doctor, a health professional, or a member of the clergy and ask for their help.
- Get connected to free, 24/7 support from a trained counselor at the Maryland Helpline. Call **(2-1-1, press 1)**, text your zip code to **898-211**, or visit **211MD.org**.

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## FACT:

**1 in 5** older adults will experience a mental health condition that can lead to suicidal thoughts and feelings.



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## Key Questions to Ask



"Do you think about taking your own life?"

"Have you made a plan to end your life?"

"Do you have what you need to carry out your plan?"

## Life Circumstances that Increase Risk

- Chronic health conditions
- Mental health struggles
- Use of alcohol, medications, or other substances that interfere with daily activities or relationships
- Ongoing pain
- Loss of autonomy
- Loneliness and isolation
- Loss of a loved one
- Relationship problems
- Financial difficulty
- A past suicide attempt
- Access to lethal means

## If you are concerned that someone is feeling distressed and possibly having thoughts of suicide:

- Talk to the person in private. Remain calm and comforting.
- Invite them to have an honest conversation about how they're feeling.
- Listen to their story without judgement.
- Take the person seriously. Avoid debating the value of life, minimizing problems, or giving advice.
- Ask directly if they're thinking about suicide.
- Tell the person you care and let them know they are not alone.
- Get connected to free, 24/7 support from a trained counselor at the Maryland Helpline. Call **(2-1-1, press 1)**, text your zip code to **898-211**, or visit **211MD.org**.

## Talking about suicide saves lives.

Suicide can be a very difficult subject to talk about. But it's important to put fears aside, because talking about suicide saves lives. In fact, many people who have considered suicide report feeling relieved when they were able to talk about their despair.

We know from research that suicide rates are very high among older adults, who are less likely to talk about their intentions and less likely to survive a suicidal act. Take any expression of suicide very seriously. There is a common myth that talking about suicide can make someone begin to feel suicidal. This is *not* true. Trust your instincts. If you sense someone is distressed or thinking about suicide, it's time to talk about it.

**For more information**, go to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention's website at **afsp.org** or the Suicide Prevention Resource Center at **sprc.org/populations/older-adults**.

**For more information about late life mental health**, please visit Older Adults: Vibrant Minds at **mdaging.org**.