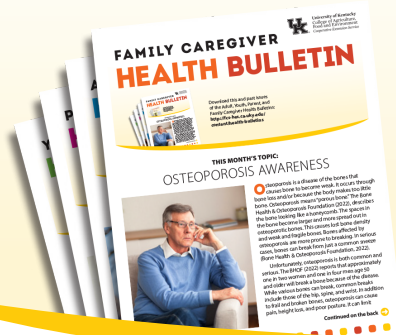


# FAMILY CAREGIVER

# HEALTH BULLETIN



**MARCH 2025**

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## THIS MONTH'S TOPIC

# RECOGNIZING SIGNS OF SUICIDE



**O**lder adults account for 22% of suicides in the U.S. according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Men age 75 and older face the highest overall rate of suicide. Older adults are known to plan suicide more carefully and use methods more likely to prove lethal. Older adults who attempt suicide are less likely to recover because of frailty or underlying medical conditions. The tragedy of suicide is a growing public health crisis.

Older adults often face loss and grief. They might lose independence, health, and financial stability. They might face widowhood, death of peers, friends and family, mobility issues, etc. Older adults are more likely to be homebound, live on their own, or lack social connections needed to thrive. When combined with physical, emotional, and

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# A critical resource for someone in crisis is the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline — available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

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cognitive struggles, older adults are susceptible to depression. Some researchers believe that the epidemic of loneliness is fueling suicide.

Health-care providers and caregivers need to recognize warning signs of suicide in older adults. Alone, one or two of these acts may not be a concern. It is common to update a will, for example. But in combination, these warning signs may mean trouble.

- Loss of interest in activities
- Giving away belongings
- Changing a will
- Avoiding social opportunities
- Neglecting self-care
- Changes in appearance
- Ignoring or skipping medications
- Preoccupation with death, talking about dying or killing oneself
- Reckless behavior or lacking concern for personal safety
- Increasing use of alcohol and/or drugs
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Extreme mood swings
- Acting anxious or agitated
- Talking about being a burden to society or others
- Talking about unbearable physical or emotional pain
- Feeling empty or hopeless
- Feeling trapped with no way out

A critical resource for someone in crisis is the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. This telephone number is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It connects you or someone you care about to mental health professionals who can talk to someone in crisis.

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline spells out five steps you can follow if you think an older adult, or anyone, is thinking about suicide:

**1. Ask.** Be direct and ask, “Are you thinking about killing yourself?” “How can I help you?” Initiate this conversation and listen carefully to their answers. Acknowledge their pain. Help the person focus on why they should keep living.



- 2. Be there.** If possible, be physically present and ease the feelings of isolation. If being face-to-face is not possible, call or try a video call to help the person feel connected. Ask a friend, family member, or neighbor to help.
- 3. Keep them safe.** If someone has tried before or has a detailed plan, the risk is greater. Call 911 or the 988 Suicide Lifeline for help to determine the next steps.
- 4. Help them connect.** Establish support systems for the present and future. Find local resources for support, connection, and mental health.
- 5. Follow up.** Research shows that follow-up can lower suicide in high-risk populations. Checking in shows you care.

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#### FAMILY CAREGIVER HEALTH BULLETIN

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