

OHIO SUICIDE PREVENTION FOUNDATION

# Seniors and Older Adults: Tips for Preventing Suicide

We live in a world where people are living longer, which means the population of older adults is growing faster, too. According to the World Health Organization, 1 in 6 people will be 60+ by the year 2030.<sup>1</sup>

Older adults are among the most vulnerable to suicide. The fact is, the rate of suicide among our aging population is growing, and white males age 85+ are the most at-risk group of all.<sup>2</sup> In Ohio, men age 75+ have the highest suicide rate among all populations.<sup>3</sup> This means each of us must do our part to help prevent suicide in the lives of the older adults in our familial, social, and spiritual groups.

## The Mental Health Connection

Research shows that mental health is key to well-being. But it be hard to ask for help ... and even harder for older adults, thanks to the stigma associated with mental health disorders and ageism.

## Risk Factors & Warning Signs

Suicide is preventable. Here's what to look for:

- Demonstrates frustration over the loss of independence
- Appears to feel hopeless, anger, or aggressive
- Seems isolated, lonely, or socially distant
- Has a medical condition that limits functionality or life expectancy
- Is cognitively impaired and has trouble with impulse control
- Has lost interest in normal activities or planning for the future
- Has previously attempted suicide
- Lacks a sense of purpose
- Has a history of depression

Adapted from Mental Health America and the National Council on Aging

## Navigating the Losses of Aging

Mental health and suicidal thoughts are of particular concern to seniors. As a population, older adults experience far too many age-related losses, such as the death of a spouse, chronic illness or pain, financial setbacks, and changes in living situations. Each of these losses can lead to feelings of profound grief, loneliness, and isolation.

Talking about grief, loss, and the issue of suicide is an act of lovingkindness.

Don't be afraid to reach out and ask them the hard questions, such as "Are you thinking of hurting yourself?" or "How satisfied are you with your life right now?"

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Older men have the highest suicide rate of any age group – four times the national average.<sup>2</sup>

## Other ways you can help

Talking, being there for someone, and keeping them safe is a good start toward preventing suicide in older adults. Here are some other things you can do to help prevent suicide in seniors:

- Connect older adults to resources and support systems
- Stay in touch by phone, text, cards, and visits
- Ensure they maintain good physical and mental health
- Encourage social relationships and connections that instill a sense of purpose
- Promote leaning into spiritual beliefs, especially those that encourage resiliency

## Resources

1. 9-8-8: Call or text the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 24/7.
2. 741741: Text "4hope" to connect with a trained Crisis Counselor within 5 minutes.
3. QPR: Learn more about the three steps anyone can learn to prevent suicide: Question. Persuade. Refer. Contact OSPF today to schedule your next training.
4. Aging.ohio.gov: Get tips, advice, and how-tos on caring for older Ohioans.



## Reference List

1. World Health Organization. "Ageing and health." <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ageing-and-health>. Accessed 25 August 2022.
2. National Association of Chronic Disease Directors. "The State of Mental Health and Aging in America." [https://www.cdc.gov/aging/pdf/mental\\_health.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/aging/pdf/mental_health.pdf). Accessed 25 August 2022.
3. Ohio Department of Health. "Suicide Demographics and Trends, Ohio, 2019." <https://bit.ly/3Tt5687>. Accessed 25 August 2022.

### ABOUT

#### OHIO SUICIDE PREVENTION FOUNDATION

**OSPF gives hope to those in crisis, strength to those in the struggle, and comfort to those in grief.** OSPF is a non-profit organization that works tirelessly to help all of Ohio's communities reduce the risk of suicide. Our work includes supporting those impacted by suicide, raising awareness of mental health issues, and coordinating community resources and evidence-based prevention strategies across the state.



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