

SAMPLE ARTICLE #1

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How to use this article: Use in publications that reach older adults themselves, such as retirement center newsletters, newspapers that cover aging and senior lifestyles, senior centers, church bulletins, etc.

When “The Golden Years” Don’t Glow

As we age, it isn’t unusual or unreasonable to think about end of life issues. It makes sense to plan to provide for our loved ones, for end of life care, even for funeral arrangements. But sometimes planning ahead can be a sign that someone is thinking of taking their own life.

Many older adults confront problems of poor health, loneliness and social isolation. Fears of prolonged illness or financial problems, uncontrolled pain, and losing friends and family members are also common. Many older adults also have access to means of suicide—particularly guns and medications. Together, these all can contribute to an elevated risk of suicide.

As with suicidal people of all ages, mental health problems, especially depression and alcohol abuse, are common contributors. But among older adults, these problems can be overlooked or may be assumed to be part of the aging process.

Depression is the most common mental disorder in seniors. But that doesn’t mean that depression is a normal part of aging, or that it is inevitable. About 20% of older adults experience undiagnosed depression. It’s normal to experience sorrow, grief, and sadness but these moods should not persist or take over your daily life.

Alcohol use and certain medical conditions can mask depressive symptoms, and are often missed in diagnoses. Luckily, depression and alcohol dependence are both highly treatable conditions.

Help is available and hope can be found.

Are you worried about someone else?

Start by reaching out to them. Encourage them to engage in activities. Look for outreach programs at a local Area Agency on Aging, senior center, church or service organization. **The Friendship Line (800) 971-0016** is a California-based service that reaches out to older adults, offering emotional and well-being resources, as well as medication oversight and compliance.

Watch for warnings. These changes are causes for concern: hoarding medication, talking about being with deceased loved ones soon, withdrawing from everyone, being preoccupied with death, increasing use of alcohol or pain medications, ceasing activities, giving away possessions suddenly, making arrangements for their pets. These signs may indicate that the person is planning suicide.

Ask the question. You won't put the idea in their minds by asking if they are thinking of ending their lives.

Call for help. At the **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255)** trained counselors will help you figure out what to do. You can also encourage the person you are concerned about to make the call.

Remove lethal means from the vicinity. You may be able to store guns with friends or family, or ask the police department or sheriff for advice. Talk with health providers or pharmacists about the best ways to reduce access to large doses of medications.

Get more information on warning signs, how to have a direct conversation with the person you are concerned about, and where to find national and local resources for support at www.SuicideisPreventable.org.

Additional Resources:

Think you might be drinking too much?

Find out with this simple anonymous online tool at www.alcoholscreening.org

Tip: Adults over age 65 who are healthy and do not take medications should not have more than: 3 drinks on a given day or 7 drinks in a week. Drinking more than these amounts puts people at risk of serious alcohol problems. If you have a health problem or take certain medications, you may need to drink less or not at all.

Are you depressed?

Talk to your healthcare provider to help manage your pain better. Ask for help in cutting back on your drinking and with your feelings of sadness or loss. A complete physical is the best way to determine whether you have depression or some other condition.

Find out more. There are lots of good resources at the Geriatric Mental Health Foundation <http://www.gmhfonline.org> under Consumer/Patient Information. If you think you may be depressed, talking to your pastor, a trusted friend, or a counselor may help.

If you are having thoughts of suicide, call the Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 (TALK). This free, confidential telephone service is available 24 hours a day and will connect you to trained counselors who can help.

In _____ County, the _____ [agency/program] is available to help older adults. Contact them at _____.