

## FACTS ABOUT

# *Elder Suicide*

Information about Depression and Suicide in the Elderly



Elderly suicide is rarely, if ever, caused by any single event or reason, but rather from many factors working in combination to produce feelings of hopelessness and depression. Since suicide for the older person is not an impulsive act, there is generally a window of opportunity to help the older person seek assistance.

### What is Depression?

Everyone feels unhappy from time to time. Things can go wrong and get someone down at work, at home or anywhere else. Being upset or sad for a while isn't necessarily depression. But, if those feelings last for an extended period of time, then that may be depression.

Depression is a serious medical condition where the body and mind are not capable of dealing with the emotions a person is feeling. There is hope. Working with a physician, effective treatments are available.

Depression in the elderly is a disorder and not a normal part of aging. Emotional experiences of sadness, grief, response to loss, and temporary "blues" are normal. Persistent depression that interferes significantly with the ability to function is not normal.

Suicide can happen in any family. However, life events commonly associated with elderly suicide are: the death of a loved one; physical illness; uncontrollable pain; fear of dying a prolonged death that damages family members emotionally and economically; social isolation and loneliness; and major changes in social roles, such as retirement.

## *Warning Signs*

- changes in eating or sleeping habits
- unexplained fatigue or apathy
- trouble concentrating, indecisiveness
- crying for no apparent reason
- inability to feel good or express joy
- behavior changes
- withdrawal from family, friends or activities
- loss of interest in hobbies, work, etc.
- loss of interest in personal appearance
- talk about or preoccupation with death
- giving away prized possessions
- taking unnecessary risks
- have had a recent loss or expect one
- increased use of alcohol, drugs or medication
- fail to take prescribed medicines or follow required diets
- acquiring a weapon

## *Tips to Help*

- Educate yourself about the signs of suicide
- Speak directly with the elderly person about suicide
- Ask direct questions about feelings and plans.
  - Get involved. Be available. Show support.
  - Don't be judgemental. Don't lecture.
- Seek help. Don't keep secrets for the person.



SUICIDE PREVENTION  
FOUNDATION

## *Sources of Help*

### ***Western Colorado Suicide Prevention Foundation***

<http://www.suicidepreventionfoundation.org>  
(970) 683-6626

### ***National Institute of Mental Health***

search "older adult suicide" at <http://www.nimh.nih.gov>

### ***National Suicide Prevention Lifeline***

1-800-273-TALK (8255)  
[www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)