

What To Do

- ◆ Take the signals seriously. If you think someone is considering suicide, ASK THEM.
- ◆ Take action. Remove easy methods they might use to kill themselves.
- ◆ **IMMEDIATELY** contact a person or organization that specializes in crisis intervention or suicide prevention for help. (See the back of this brochure.)
- ◆ Show interest in the person, and be supportive of him or her.
- ◆ Offer hope that alternatives to suicide exist.
- ◆ Seek help from his or her family, friends, physician, clergy, etc.

What Not To Do

- ◆ Don't act shocked, or lecture the person on the value of life.
- ◆ Don't taunt or dare them to "do it".
- ◆ Don't judge them, or tell them that their thoughts or feelings are good or bad.
- ◆ Don't debate whether suicide is right or wrong.
- ◆ Don't let them swear you to secrecy.
- ◆ Don't offer glib reassurance - it may make the person feel as if you really don't understand or care about them.

Where to Get Help

If you -- or someone you know -- are thinking about suicide, call:

1-800-SUICIDE (784-2433)

The National Hopeline Network will automatically connect you with a certified local crisis center, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

For additional information on suicide prevention, training, or publications, visit:

www.preventsuicideva.org

or contact:

VDH VIRGINIA
DEPARTMENT
OF HEALTH
Protecting You and Your Environment
www.vdh.state.va.us

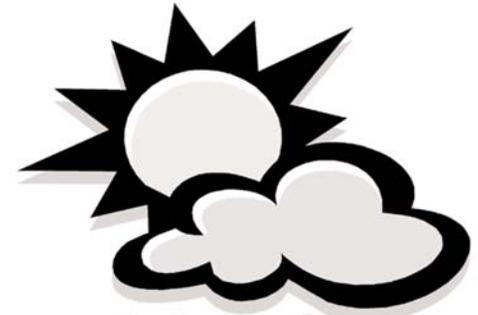
Center for Injury & Violence Prevention
Toll Free: 1-800-732-8333 (VA only)
Phone: (804) 864-7741

For aging-related information:

Virginia Department for the Aging
1610 Forest Avenue, Suite 100
Richmond, VA 23229
Toll-Free: 1-800-552-3402
(Nationwide Voice/TTY)
Richmond: (804) 662-9333
Fax: (804) 662-9354
E-mail: aging@vda.virginia.gov
Web Site: www.vda.virginia.gov



When It's More Than



“Just Feeling Blue”

Preventing Suicide
among the
Aging
in
Virginia



Preventable Statistics

For many people, the process of aging brings time to relax and enjoy life. For some older adults, however, physical or emotional pain prevents them from enjoying their later years. If their pain is not addressed, they may eventually consider taking their own life as a way to find relief.

Tragically, Virginia loses one member of its aging population to suicide every three days. Virginians over the age of 65 have a suicide rate that is more than double that of all other age groups in the state. Though older Virginians make up only 11% of the state's population, they account for 21% of the suicides. Studies have also found that:

- ◆ Older men are four times as likely to take their own lives as older women.
- ◆ Aging Caucasians are more likely to die by suicide than are members of minority communities.
- ◆ Suicide deaths are more likely among older residents of rural areas than those who live in urban areas.
- ◆ Older Virginians are most likely to use firearms to carry out their suicide plans.

Since older people do not usually take their own lives on impulse, opportunities exist for them to receive the help they need. Noticing and caring about a suicidal older adult can make the difference between life and death.

Causes

Suicide is rarely caused by a single event. It is usually the result of many factors combined over a period of time. The following are some common causes of suicidal thoughts or behavior in older adults:

Loss of Self-Esteem can result when someone experiences the losses and stresses that often accompany aging. They may express feelings of uselessness, hopelessness, and anger at the aging process.

Depression is a major factor in late-life suicides. It is not the feeling of sadness that all people experience occasionally, but a deeper and more long-lasting feeling of hopelessness. Depression is not a natural part of aging, and it can be treated successfully.

Abuse of Alcohol or Drugs is a method that some aging individuals turn to for relief from feelings of depression or loneliness. However, they usually serve to magnify the feelings from which the person is trying to escape.

Chronic Illness afflicts some older adults with serious, painful or debilitating results. Coupled with feelings of hopelessness and despair, they may lead an older person to contemplate suicide.

Isolation from family and friends may make an older person more susceptible to depression and substance abuse.

Signals

There are some behaviors that signal possible suicidal thoughts or actions by an older person. Knowing these signals and taking action may give you the chance to save someone's life. A person might be suicidal if they:

- ◆ Are prone to accidents, especially to falls;
- ◆ Lose weight or have a decrease in appetite;
- ◆ Increase their use of alcohol or drugs;
- ◆ Change their sleeping pattern;
- ◆ Become withdrawn or isolate themselves from family and friends;
- ◆ Have sadness or depression that will not go away;
- ◆ Give away possessions they have cherished;
- ◆ Purchase a firearm; or
- ◆ **Talk about or threaten to commit suicide.** (If this happens, take IMMEDIATE ACTION.)

It is important to remember that any one of these signals alone do not necessarily indicate that a person is suicidal. On the other hand, several signals appearing together may be very important. Signals are even more important if the person has attempted suicide in the past.