

## what to do

- Take the risk factors and signals seriously. If you think someone is considering suicide, ASK HIM OR HER “Are you suicidal?” or “Do you want to kill yourself?” If the answer is “yes,” GET HELP.
- Show interest in the person and be supportive of him or her.
- Offer hope that there are alternatives to suicide.
- Take action. Remove methods the person might use to kill him or herself.
- Seek help from his or her family, friend, physician, clergy, etc.
- IMMEDIATELY contact a person or organization that specializes in crisis intervention or suicide prevention for help. (See the back of this brochure).

## what to avoid

- Avoid acting shocked or lecturing the person on the value of life.
- Avoid taunting or daring him or her to “do it.”
- Avoid judging. Allow him or her to express his or her thoughts or feelings.
- Avoid debates over whether suicide is right or wrong.
- Avoid offering glib reassurance—it may make the person feel as if you really don’t understand or care about him or her.
- Don’t keep yours or another person’s suicidal thoughts a secret. GET HELP.

## where to get help

If you or someone you know is thinking about suicide, call **800-273-TALK** (8255).

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



For additional information on suicide prevention or publications contact:

**Tennessee Suicide Prevention Network**

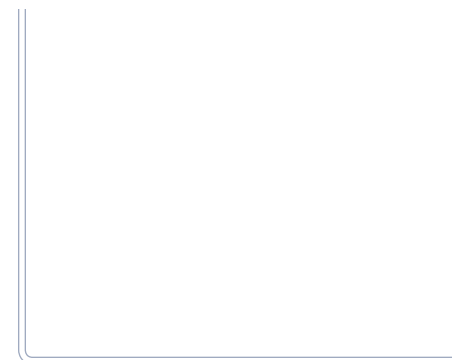


295 Plus Park Blvd., Suite 201  
Nashville, TN 37217  
ph: 615-297-1077 f: 615-269-5413  
[www.tspn.org](http://www.tspn.org)

This brochure is dedicated in loving memory  
of George W. and Vena J. Bernard.



**Saving Senior Lives**  
in Tennessee



## the facts

For many people, the later years are a time to relax and enjoy life. For some older adults, however, physical or emotional pain prevents them from finding fulfillment. If their pain is not addressed, they may eventually consider taking their own life.

Tragically, Tennessee loses one member of its aging population to suicide every three days. Tennesseans over the age of 65 have a suicide rate double that of any other age group in the state. Though older Tennesseans made up only 13% of the state's population in 2006, they accounted for 18% 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 Tennesseans are most likely to use firearms to carry out their suicide plans. Since older people do not usually take their own lives on impulse, there are opportunities for them to get the help they need. Noticing and caring about a suicidal older adult can make the difference between life and death.

## risk factors

Suicide is never caused by a single event. It is the result of many factors over a period of time. Following are some common causes of suicidal thoughts or behavior in seniors or older adults:

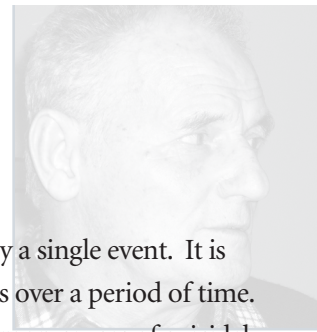
**LOSS OF SELF-ESTEEM** can result from the losses and stresses that often accompany aging. Older adults may express feelings of uselessness, hopelessness or anger at the aging process.

**DEPRESSION** is a major factor in late-life suicides. It is more than just “sadness” that all people experience occasionally. It is a deeper and more long-lasting feeling of hopelessness and despair. Depression is not a natural part of aging. It can be treated successfully.

**ABUSE OF ALCOHOL OR DRUGS** is a way that some aging individuals cope with feelings of depression or loneliness. However, this usually magnifies 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, such illnesses may lead an older person to contemplate suicide.

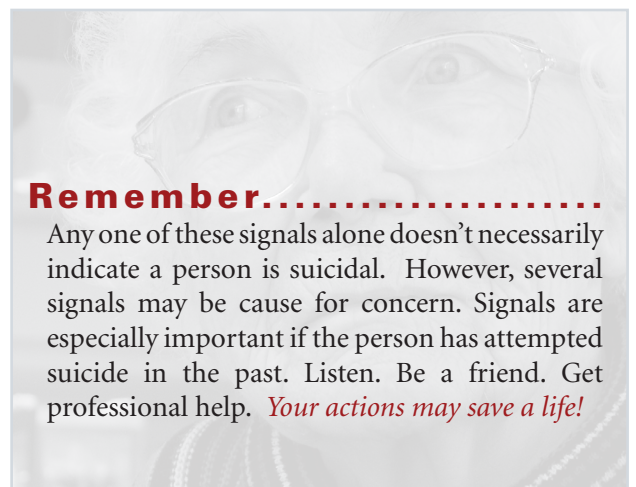
**ISOLATION** from family and friends may make an older person more susceptible to loneliness, depression and substance abuse.



## signals

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

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



**Remember.....**  
Any one of these signals alone doesn't necessarily indicate a person is suicidal. However, several signals may be cause for concern. Signals are especially important if the person has attempted suicide in the past. Listen. Be a friend. Get professional help. *Your actions may save a life!*