

# Suicidal Statements, Thoughts, and Gestures in Older Adults: A Guide for Patients & Families

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Suicidal thoughts and statements can occur in older adults, especially when someone is experiencing depression, severe stress, chronic illness, pain, or major life changes. Any mention of wanting to die, feeling like a burden, or talking about suicide should always be taken seriously. Early recognition and prompt support can help keep older adults safe and connect them with the care they need.

## Examples of Concerning Statements

- “I wish I were dead.”
- “Everyone would be better off without me.”
- “I don’t see the point of going on.”
- “I’m tired of living like this.”
- Talking about wanting to die or harm oneself

## Possible Warning Signs

- Talking about death or suicide
- Giving away possessions
- Withdrawing from family or friends
- Sudden mood changes
- Increased alcohol or medication misuse
- Talking about being a burden
- Searching for ways to harm oneself

## Risk Factors in Older Adults

- Depression or other mental health conditions
- Chronic pain or serious medical illness
- Loss of a spouse, friend, or independence
- Social isolation or loneliness
- Cognitive decline or dementia
- Substance misuse
- Access to lethal means

## Suicidal Gestures or Behaviors

- Stockpiling medications
- Talking about methods of suicide
- Attempting to harm oneself
- Sudden calmness after severe distress
- Writing goodbye notes or preparing final arrangements

## What Families and Caregivers Should Do

- Take all statements seriously
- Stay calm and listen without judgment
- Ask directly if the person is thinking about suicide
- Do not leave the person alone if risk seems high
- Remove or secure medications, firearms, or other dangerous items
- Contact healthcare providers for urgent evaluation

## When to Seek Immediate Help

- If someone expresses a plan to harm themselves
- If suicidal thoughts are persistent or worsening
- If the person has access to dangerous means
- If the person has already attempted self-harm
- Call emergency services if immediate danger is present

## Ways to Support Someone in Distress

- Encourage professional help from doctors or mental health specialists
- Offer emotional support and reassurance
- Stay connected through regular contact
- Help address contributing factors such as pain, loneliness, or depression

## National Crisis Resources

✓ Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

☎ Call or text 988 | 🌐 [988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org)

✓ National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)

☎ 1-800-950-NAMI | 🌐 [nami.org](https://nami.org)

✓ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

☎ 1-800-662-HELP | 🌐 [samhsa.gov](https://samhsa.gov)

✓ Eldercare Locator

☎ 1-800-677-1116 | 🌐 [eldercare.acl.gov](https://eldercare.acl.gov)

## Final Notes

- Suicidal thoughts in older adults are a serious medical and mental health concern.
- Early recognition and compassionate response can save lives.
- Families and healthcare providers should work together to ensure safety and treatment.