



Psych Support Series: Mental Health & Suicide Prevention for Older Adults

Presented by Dimitris Kiosses, Ph.D. on September 8, 2022, at 3 PM.

Depression in Older Adults

- **Gateway symptoms** of depression in older adults may include:
 - Depressed mood
 - Loss of interest in pleasure (anhedonia)
 - Hopelessness, guilt, and agitation
 - Pseudodementia (memory loss that is related to depression and not dementia)
- **Physical symptoms** of depression in older adults may include:
 - Excessive fatigue
 - Appetite loss
- **Differentiating depression** and everyday sadness:
 - Intense negative emotions that are long lasting, effect everyday functioning, and are presented with a cluster of other symptoms.
- Remember that **depression is not a normal part of aging**. If you or someone you know begins to experience depressive symptoms, speak to a caretaker, primary care physician, therapist, or psychiatrist.
- When addressing **depression in older adults**, start by:
 - Assessing triggers of depressive episodes and reduce causes of the “emotional storm.”
 - Write down verbatim negative thoughts to assess later during psychotherapy.
 - Practice coping strategies and record which strategies work best.
 - Identify barriers to treatment and improve medication regimen.

Suicide in Older Adults

- When addressing **suicide** in older adults, remember to:
 - Directly ask if someone is considering suicide and listen carefully to what and how something is said. Question the wording and any delay in responses.
 - Create a “hope kit” that includes coping strategies and reminders of happiness and positivity within the person’s life.
 - Create a “safety plan” and remove anything lethal from the area.
 - Increase activities and social contact and implement useful coping strategies.

Resources for Families, Caretakers, & Clinicians

- It is important for **family members and caretakers** to remember:
 - You may provide as much support as you can to the individual in need, but you cannot control their actions. You are not at fault if someone chooses to commit suicide.
 - There may be added interpersonal tension and worry within a family or relationship when an older adult is depressed or suicidal. Try to reach out and ask how they are feeling.
 - It can be hard for the depressed or suicidal individual to initiate contact or ask for help.
- It is important for **clinicians** to remember:
 - Though clinicians are a primary level of support, it is out of their control whether an individual commits suicide.
 - It can be incredibly difficult to diagnose and treat depression in older adults. Record anything that works for each individual patient.
 - The risk of depression may increase along with disability and impairment. Consider collaborating with primary care physicians to address treatment.

Resources

- WCM Institute of Geriatric Psychiatry: <https://psychiatry.weill.cornell.edu/weill-cornell-institute-geriatric-psychiatry>
- WCM Institute of Geriatric Psychiatry Patient/Family Guide: <https://psychiatry.weill.cornell.edu/information-patients-and-families>
- Kiosses Labs: <https://kiosseslab.weill.cornell.edu/>
- Support Groups for Loss Survivors: <https://afsp.org/find-a-support-group>
- Suicide Loss Survivors Resources: <https://allianceofhope.org/>
- National Council on Aging: <https://ncoa.org/article/suicide-and-older-adults-what-you-should-know>
- Suicide Prevention Resource Center: <https://www.sprc.org/populations/older-adults>

Emotion, Cognition, and Psychotherapy Lab

Weill-Cornell Institute of Geriatric Psychiatry

21 Bloomingdale Rd

White Plains, NY 10605

<https://kiosseslab.weill.cornell.edu/>

Crisis Services

24/7 Crisis Hotline: 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

If you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis, help is available. Call or text [988](https://988lifeline.org) or chat 988lifeline.org. Veterans, press 1 when calling.

Crisis Text Line

Text [TALK to 741-741](https://talkto741-741.org) to text with a trained crisis counselor from the Crisis Text Line for free, 24/7

Veterans Crisis Line

Send a text to [838255](https://838255.org)

SAMHSA Treatment Referral Hotline (Substance Abuse)

[1-800-662-HELP \(4357\)](https://1-800-662-HELP.org)

RAINN National Sexual Assault Hotline

[1-800-656-HOPE \(4673\)](https://1-800-656-HOPE.org)

Resources for Survivors of Suicide Loss

I've lost someone

<https://afsp.org/live-lost-someone>

After A Suicide Resource Directory: Coping with Grief, Trauma, and Distress

<http://www.personalgriefcoach.net>

This online directory links people who are grieving after a suicide death to resources and information.

Alliance of Hope for Suicide Survivors

<http://www.allianceofhope.org>

This organization for survivors of suicide loss provides information sheets, a blog, and a community forum through which survivors can share with each other.

Friends for Survival

<http://www.friendsforsurvival.org>

This organization is for suicide loss survivors and professionals who work with them. It produces a monthly newsletter and runs the Suicide Loss Helpline (1-800-646-7322). It also published *Pathways to Purpose and Hope*, a guide to building a community-based suicide survivor support program.

Parents of Suicides and Friends & Families of Suicides (POS-FFOS)

<http://www.pos-ffos.com>

This website provides a public message board called Suicide Grief Support Forum, a listserv for parents, a separate listserv for others, and an online chat room for survivors of suicide loss.

Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS)

<https://www.taps.org/suicide>

This organization provides resources and programs for people grieving the loss of a loved one who died while serving in the U.S. armed forces or as a result of their service. It has special resources and programs for suicide loss survivors.

United Survivors

<https://unitesurvivors.org/>

This organization is a place where people who have experienced suicide loss, suicide attempts, and suicidal thoughts and feelings, and their friends and families, can connect to use their lived experience to advocate for policy, systems, and cultural change.

Resources taken from American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (<https://afsp.org>) and the Suicide Prevention Resource Center (<https://www.sprc.org>)