

# Fact Sheets for Residents:

Look Out for the Well-Being of Yourself and Others

Know the Warning Signs of Suicide

After a Suicide: How to Help Yourself and Others

2010

## Instructions for Using the *Fact Sheets for Residents*

The *Fact Sheets for Residents* provide senior living community residents and their families with useful information on three topics: maintaining mental health, preventing suicide, and coping with suicide. They are intended to be given to residents by staff or other mental health professionals. Since they cover emotionally sensitive topics, these sheets should be given to residents only in settings in which they can be discussed. A staff person can help explain the information, answer questions, and help residents deal with any feelings that may come up.

The following provides suggested settings in which the fact sheets can be distributed and discussed:

- ◆ ***Looking Out for the Well-Being of Yourself and Others:***
  - ◇ Family and Resident Workshop
  - ◇ Health promotion or wellness programs
- ◆ ***Know the Warning Signs of Suicide:***
  - ◇ Family and Resident Workshop
  - ◇ Support group run by a social worker or other mental health professional
  - ◇ Individual sessions with a social worker or other mental health professional
- ◆ ***After a Suicide: How to Help Yourself and Others***
  - ◇ Community meetings, as described in the Guide, *Tool 3.f: Community Support Meetings for Senior Living Communities*
  - ◇ Support group run by a social worker or other mental health professional
  - ◇ Individual sessions with a social worker or other mental health professional

The fact sheets may also be useful handouts for participants in the staff workshops. The sheets provide staff with the key information and wording to use in discussing issues related to mental health and suicide with residents.

At the end of each fact sheet is space to fill in the names of relevant contact people from whom residents (or staff) can seek help. At least one person should be in your senior living community, such as a social worker or other mental health professional. Also list a contact person in a local agency, such as a community mental health center. Please be sure this information is on the fact sheets when you give them to residents (or staff).



# Look Out for the Well-Being of Yourself and Others

No matter what age you are, it is important to look out for your own emotional well-being. This is especially true for older adults because of the special challenges at this stage of life. Taking charge of your emotional well-being can make a big difference.

**Are you in pain? Do you feel depressed?**

**Are you lonely? Have you experienced a loss?**

***You don't have to feel this way. Read on . . .***

## Take Care of Yourself

Your emotional well-being is affected by your health. If you need help or support, staff at your senior living community can help you see a medical or mental health provider. Your facility may also offer health and wellness activities.

Here are some suggestions to take care of your health:

- ◆ Make an appointment with a medical provider if you are in pain or have a physical illness.
- ◆ Seek treatment or talk to a counselor if you have depression or another mental health issue, or if you drink too much or abuse medications.
- ◆ Join a support group to help you cope with the loss of family and friends, financial problems, or other personal issues.
- ◆ Stay active and exercise regularly. Try taking a group exercise class or going on walks.
- ◆ Eat a healthy diet. Avoid too much sugar, salt, fat, and caffeine.

Taking care of your physical and mental health will help you feel better and reduce feelings of helplessness.

### Mrs. Williams

At 80 years old, Mrs. Williams was just settling into a senior living community when she broke her hip. Since she couldn't walk, she slept most of the day and seemed very withdrawn. She said she felt her life was over.

Another resident was concerned that Mrs. Williams was depressed and told the staff. They talked with her children and decided she needed to see a counselor. Mrs. Williams did not like the idea, but her children insisted.

The counselor had Mrs. Williams take anti-depressants for six months and go to physical therapy. Her family provided support to her.

The staff encouraged her to get involved in activities she could do, such as arts and crafts and welcoming new residents. These activities gave her a sense of purpose and helped her build relationships.

Now Mrs. Williams is feeling better physically and emotionally and enjoys spending time with other residents and staff.

## Get Involved

Getting involved in intellectual and creative activities is a valuable way to build your skills and give you a sense of purpose. If an activity that interests you is not offered at your facility, find out how you can help get it started. Here are some possible activities:

- ◆ Attend a discussion group or presentation on a topic of interest to you
- ◆ Do arts and crafts activities
- ◆ Go to a poetry, music, or theater event at the facility
- ◆ Join or start a book club
- ◆ Take a class in sewing, computer, carpentry, or financial management

You can build skills or start a new hobby at any age. You just need to be willing to try.

## Reach Out

The well-being of older adults is affected by **strong** relationships with family, friends, and other residents. Here are some ways to help you build relationships in your facility, share emotional support, and have fun:

- ◆ Go on group trips to social, sporting, and cultural events
- ◆ Attend parties to celebrate holidays, birthdays, and other special occasions
- ◆ Play bingo, bridge, or poker
- ◆ Join the committee to welcome new residents
- ◆ Mentor or be a buddy for new residents
- ◆ Join a committee involved in facility decision making
- ◆ Volunteer to help others in your local area

Reaching out to other residents and staff will also help you look out for the emotional well-being of others.

### Helping Others

Look out for the emotional well-being of other residents. Someone might be helped by your friendship and encouragement to get involved in activities or to see a mental health professional.

Remember to be respectful. If you are concerned about a resident, decide if it would be more helpful to talk with a nurse or social worker about the person or to talk with the resident directly.

## If You or Someone Else Needs Help

In this facility, contact: \_\_\_\_\_

In the local community, contact: \_\_\_\_\_

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: call 1-800-273-TALK (8255); 24 hours, 7 days

# Know the Warning Signs of Suicide

**Have you heard someone make these statements? Have you thought them yourself?**

*"I think I'm going to end it all."*

*"I no longer want to live."*

*"Death seems like the only way out."*

**Have you seen someone doing any of these things? Are you doing them?**

*Hoarding pills. Getting a gun or knife. Looking for a high place from which to jump. Refusing food, medicine, or other treatment.*

These behaviors and statements are warning signs of suicide. The person needs IMMEDIATE help. Contact a nurse, social worker, doctor, mental health professional, or clergy RIGHT AWAY.



**Do either of these descriptions sound like your neighbor, a friend, or yourself?**

- ◆ A resident has been drinking more than usual. He doesn't think his life has any purpose now that his wife is gone. He yells at the food servers and maintenance staff for taking too long.
- ◆ Another resident has stopped coming to bridge club and exercise class. She paces around at night, unable to sleep. She says she feels hopeless, that nothing in her life will ever improve.

These residents may be showing warning signs that they are **considering suicide**. Get help if you notice any of these behaviors and moods in yourself or another resident.

**3 warning signs that a person could be at immediate risk of suicide:**

- ◆ Threatening or talking about wanting to kill or hurt him/herself
- ◆ Looking for ways to kill him/herself
- ◆ Talking or writing about death, dying, or suicide when this is not usual for the person.

**Warning signs that a person could be considering suicide:**

## **BEHAVIOR**

- ◆ Withdrawing from family, friends, or others
- ◆ Sleeping all the time or unable to sleep
- ◆ Acting reckless
- ◆ Increasing use of alcohol or drugs

## **MOOD**

- ◆ Hopeless or feeling trapped
- ◆ No sense of purpose in life
- ◆ Anxious or agitated
- ◆ Rage, uncontrolled anger
- ◆ Dramatic changes in mood

## Challenges Facing Older Adults

Most of the residents in this community are active, engaged, productive, and positive. However, some older adults face challenges that make it more likely they could become depressed, or even suicidal. These challenges include:

- ◆ Loss of family members, friends, and community support
- ◆ Major life changes, such as retirement, change in financial status, and moving from a home or community
- ◆ Physical illness and disability

**The majority of people who attempt suicide are depressed. Depression is not a normal part of aging. It is a treatable illness.**

## What You Can Do

If you or someone you know is showing any of the warning signs of suicide, talk with a nurse, doctor, clergy, social worker, or mental health professional.

While that's easy to say, it's not always easy to do. People are sometimes uncomfortable seeking help for mental health problems. If they've never done it before, they may not know what to expect.

The stigma or belief that someone should be able to cope on his or her own can also prevent a person from getting much needed treatment.

Taking care of your mental health is just as important as taking care of your physical health.

***If you had a hearing loss, you would get help.***

**Do the same with a mental health concern.**

**SUICIDE CAN BE PREVENTED!**

## If You or Someone Else Shows Warning Signs of Suicide

In this facility, contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Or contact: \_\_\_\_\_

In the local community, contact: \_\_\_\_\_

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: call 1-800-273-TALK (8255); 24 hours, 7 days

# After a Suicide: How to Help Yourself and Others

When a person dies by suicide, it can have a huge impact on family members, friends, other residents, and staff. Whether you have lost someone by suicide or want to help another person who has, it is useful to know what to expect and how to best help someone else.

## How to Help Yourself

Coping with a suicide can cause many emotions. Strong feelings are normal. No one has the same reaction, and emotions can change. Take time to figure out how you feel. You may be feeling any of the following:

|           |        |       |
|-----------|--------|-------|
| disbelief | denial | grief |
| guilt     | anger  | shame |

An attempted suicide can often bring up some of these same emotions.

Here are some tips for coping:

- ◆ **Give yourself time** to deal with the loss and accept whatever emotions you feel. Everyone grieves differently.
- ◆ **Talk about the person** who died with someone you trust—a family member, resident, or staff.
- ◆ **Honor the memory** of the person who died—set out pictures of the person in your room or write something about him or her.
- ◆ **Express your feelings** with a counselor or in a support group with others who are likely to understand what you are going through.
- ◆ **Stay with your daily routine** and take care of your basic needs—eat, sleep, and attend your regular activities.
- ◆ **Be prepared for holidays and anniversaries**, since they can be difficult emotionally—consider doing something special in memory of the person who died.

## Why did it happen?

It's common to try to figure out *why* someone took his or her life. Yet, the answers may not be known. The causes of suicide are complicated and different for each person. And, the person who died may be the only one able to answer your questions. At some point, most people accept that clear reasons may not exist, and that knowing *why* will not change what happened. This acceptance is a key step in healing.

## Take Care of Yourself

The suicide of a family member, friend, or resident can affect your mental health. Get help if you feel suicidal yourself.

# How to Help Others

**How you feel about suicide will affect how you respond to others. Take the time to get clear about your feelings before you try to help someone else.**

People who lose a friend or relative by suicide need a lot of support and understanding. The loss and shock of suicide can make a person more sensitive, so be extra careful not to say or do something that could make the person feel worse.

If you feel uncomfortable about suicide, it can be especially hard to know how to respond to someone who has experienced a loss like this. It is helpful to avoid judgment and blame related to the cause of death.

## What to say

- ◆ Express empathy.
- ◆ “I am so sorry for your loss.” Acknowledge their pain and sadness.  
    “I can see that you are hurting.”
- ◆ Ask if they want to talk about the person, then just listen.  
    “Do you want to talk about \_\_\_\_\_?”
- ◆ Let them know you care about their well-being.  
    “I am here to support you in any way.”

## What to do

- ◆ Be kind and reach out—send a card, have tea or lunch together, watch a television show or movie together
- ◆ Call and visit regularly
- ◆ Listen when they talk about their feelings and don't try to make them feel better
- ◆ Offer to help with their responsibilities, but don't take over unless they ask

## How do you feel?

Your attitude and feelings can make a big difference to someone who has lost a friend or loved one by suicide. Acceptance is key to helping them deal with the loss.

- ◆ Accept all their feelings.
- ◆ Accept that you will not be able to ease their pain.
- ◆ Accept that their loss can't be compared to anyone else's.
- ◆ Accept that the suicide was not an accident.
- ◆ Accept that healing will take a long time. Be patient and understanding.

Your understanding and support are what the person needs most.

# Resources to Help Cope with a Suicide

In this facility, contact: \_\_\_\_\_

In the local community, contact: \_\_\_\_\_

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: call 1-800-273-TALK (8255); 24 hours, 7 days

SOS-Handbook for Survivors of Suicide: [http://www.sprc.org/library/SOS\\_handbook.pdf](http://www.sprc.org/library/SOS_handbook.pdf).