

Depression & Suicide

In light of the recent tragic murder/suicide in Newton, this article and a program on 12/8, will address the facts and warning signs around depression and suicide. According to the National Institute of Health, “older Americans are disproportionately likely to die by suicide.” Older Americans “accounted for 16% of all suicide deaths in 2004”. (NIH) Older white men appear to be the most vulnerable to committing suicide.

Depression is one of the conditions associated with suicide in older adults and is often under-recognized and under-treated. Due to the stigma attached to mental health care, older adults will more likely see their primary care professional when experiencing depression. Unfortunately, not all primary care physicians are trained to assess and manage suicide risk or depression. Nearly 75% of the elderly who committed suicide visited a doctor within a month prior to their death. (NIH) Often signs that an older person is depressed and thinking of suicide are confused with signs of aging.

Here are some warning signs:

- Talking or writing or reading about death or suicide
- Making statements of hopelessness or helplessness
- Failure to take care of self or follow medical orders
- Stockpiling medications; abusing drugs (prescription or other) or alcohol
- Withdrawing from family or friends; elaborate good-byes or giving away items
- Disruption in sleep patterns
- Sudden interest in firearms

There are ways to help a person contemplating suicide: recognize the warning signs; know which community resources or health professionals to call; and talk openly about your concerns. Though it is difficult to talk to someone we suspect to be considering suicide, it is worth the try if it can save a life. The key is to be honest and sensitive (“I’ve been worried about you; you seem down.”) Sometimes just listening & showing interest can make a big difference. If you feel that you or a friend is having a mental health emergency, you can call the Riverside Community Care Emergency Service at 1-800-529-5077. Or you can call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273- 8255.

The Social Services staff of the Newton Department of Senior Services will present a program on suicide awareness on Tuesday, December 8 at 1 p.m. The goals of the program are to help participants understand the warning signs; appropriate responses; and local resources.
