

# HEART MENTAL HEALTH NOTES

HEALTH EDUCATION & AGING RESOURCE TEAM (HEART)

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## SEPTEMBER IS NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION MONTH

**Suicide is one of the leading causes of death in the US, and rates are on the rise- especially among people age 65 and over.**

**Q: Why is suicide higher among older adults?**

**A:** Reasons include depression, grief over the passing of loved ones, loss of abilities, living with chronic illness, chronic pain and more. Older adults tend to plan suicide more carefully and use more lethal methods. Decline in cognitive function can affect a person's decision-making abilities and increase impulsivity.

## **WARNING SIGNS OF SUICIDE IN OLDER ADULTS**

Part of preventing suicide is knowing warning signs. In addition to expressing intent, there are certain behaviors that indicate an older adult is thinking about self-harming. These include Loss of interest in activities they used to enjoy ♦ Giving away beloved items or changing their will ♦ Avoiding social activities ♦ Neglecting self-care, medical regimens, and grooming ♦ Exhibiting a preoccupation with death ♦ Lacking concern for personal safety.

## **HOW TO SUPPORT SOMEONE WITH SUICIDAL THOUGHTS**

1. **Ask.** Don't be afraid to be direct with the person at risk. Ask questions like, "Are you thinking about suicide?" and "How can I help you?" to initiate a conversation in a supportive and unbiased way. Be

sure to listen carefully to their answers and acknowledge their emotional pain. Help the person stay focused on reasons why they should want to keep living.

2. **Be there.** If you're able to, be physically present for the person to ease feelings of isolation and provide a sense of connectedness. If a face-to-face visit is not possible, be there for them via phone or video calls.
3. **Keep them safe.** Find out if the person has already made any attempts on their life. Do they have a specific plan or timing in mind? Do they have access to their planned method of self-harm? In general, the more detailed a person's suicide plan is, the higher their risk.
4. **Help them connect.** If a senior in your life is thinking about suicide, it's important for them to establish support systems on which they can rely. \*Call or text 988 for immediate assistance.
5. **Follow up.** Studies have shown that following up can reduce suicide-related deaths in high-risk populations. Once you've had an initial conversation with the vulnerable person and helped them establish a support network, make sure to check in. It can be as simple as a card or phone call.



### **Senior Resources of Guilford**

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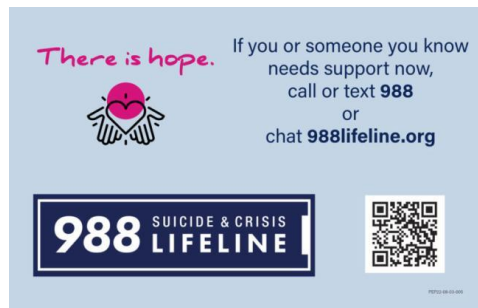
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### **DID YOU KNOW?**

People ages 85 and older  
had the highest rates of  
suicide in 2023.



## THE 988 SUICIDE & CRISIS LIFELINE (988 LIFELINE) IS A LEADER IN SUICIDE PREVENTION AND MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS CARE.

If you've ever been in a crisis, you know it's difficult to think clearly and/or look for phone numbers for help.

In July 2022, "988" became the US dialing code for the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, which replaced what was, since 2005, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (NSPL), reachable via "1-800-273-TALK". The transition from a ten to three-digit dialing code was intended to increase awareness and use of the lifeline.

The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States and its territories. The 988 Lifeline is comprised of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining local care and resources with national standards and best practices.

This provides help seekers with faster, more localized support, ensuring they receive care when, where, and how they need it most.

In May 2024, 988 Lifeline received 610,378 calls, texts, and chat messages. If you or someone you know is experiencing a suicidal or mental health crisis, call 988. They know how to help you and will. Someone will always answer. No one will ever put you on hold.

Wishing you Healthy Aging!

*Julia*

- Call me to schedule a training: 336-373-4816 ext. 258 or email [gast-rn@senior-resources-guilford.org](mailto:gast-rn@senior-resources-guilford.org)  
We'll talk about topics and times!

Julia Metcalf is the HEART Leader for Senior Resources of Guilford. She is a Psychiatric Mental Health Registered Nurse, recently retired from the Veteran's Affairs Medical Center in Salisbury NC. Julia lives in Greensboro where she enjoys playing piano and reading poetry to her Munchkin cats, Lucy and Ethel.