

# Signs of Emotional Distress in Older Adults

## Physical Signs

- Disheveled appearance, such as unkempt clothing or unwashed hair
- Body odor
- Wearing clothing inappropriate for the weather or wearing the same clothes each day
- Appears to be losing or gaining weight rapidly
- Complaints of physical pain
- Wounds or injuries that are not healing or are not being cared for
- Lack of needed medication or presence of empty medication bottles
- Not wearing or using needed assistive devices, such as dentures, glasses, hearing aids

## Emotional Signs

- Verbal reports of or giving the appearance of feeling sad, worried, angry or lonely
- Reporting that “no one cares about me” or “it doesn’t matter what happens to me”
- Expressing fears of being a burden to others
- Irritability or angry outbursts
- Suspiciousness and/or fearfulness
- Reports little or no contact with friends or family
- Excessively “high” mood that is unusual for the person
- Reports that “life isn’t worth living,” “I’m not going to be around for much longer” or “no one will miss me when I’m gone”
- Rapid changes of mood

## Behavioral Signs

- Tearfulness or crying
- Agitation, including pacing, wringing hands, pulling hair or other fidgeting
- Neglect of self-care
- Neglect of home environment, including living space, outdoor space, animals
- Increased use of alcohol or misuse of prescription or non-prescription medications
- Wandering
- Difficulty managing basic activities of daily living
- Giving away favorite possessions
- Not engaging in activities normally enjoyed

## Cognitive Signs

- Repeatedly asking the same questions
- Not remembering to pay bills
- Forgetting to make and/or keep necessary appointments
- Disoriented presentation, such as not knowing what day or time it is
- Believing that the present is actually the past
- Not remembering familiar people or objects
- Sees, hears or smells things that others do not

**If you or someone you know is in distress, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline  
1-800-273-TALK (8255)**