

## MYTHS ABOUT SUICIDE

MYTH: People who talk about suicide won't really do it

FACT: Almost everyone who attempts suicide does give some prior warning. Ignoring such warnings can be deadly. People who say things like "you'll be sorry when I'm dead" or "I can't see any way out" should be taken seriously. This is true even if the words are spoken casually as such expressions can indicate serious suicidal feelings. Ask the person what he or she means by the statement.

MYTH: Talking about suicide may give someone the idea

FACT: Supportive individuals do not give a suicidal person morbid ideas by acknowledging that the at-risk person is thinking about self-destruction. The opposite is true – honest and respectful acknowledgment of an individual's distress can help the person cope with the impulse and seek alternative solutions

MYTH: If a person is determined to kill him/herself, nothing can stop him/her.

FACT: The overriding wish of most suicidal people is not specifically to die. They want an

end to pain that they feel is unbearable and will not stop. The impulse is to end it all, however overpowering, does not last forever.

*Taken from: Building awareness - reducing risk: mental illness and suicide. World mental health day 2006 material provided by World Federation for Mental Health*

## WARNING SIGNS OF SUICIDE

Seek help as soon as possible by contacting a mental health professional if you or someone you know exhibits any of the following signs:

- Threatening to hurt or kill oneself or talking about wanting to hurt or kill oneself
- Looking for ways to kill oneself by seeking access to firearms, available pills, or other means
- Talking or writing about death, dying, or suicide when these actions are out of the ordinary for the person
- Feeling rage or uncontrolled anger or seeking revenge
- Feeling hopeless
- Acting reckless or engaging in risky activities—seemingly without thinking
- Feeling trapped—like there's no way out
- Increasing alcohol or drug use
- Withdrawing from friends, family, and society

- Feeling anxious, agitated, or unable to sleep or sleeping all the time
- Experiencing dramatic mood changes
- Seeing no reason for living or having no sense of purpose in life

*Taken from: <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>*

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT SUICIDE

Q: Wouldn't most people feel suicidal under really stressful situations; for example, being left by someone you really love or finding out you have a life-threatening illness?

A: Suicidal thoughts and behaviors are not the natural consequence of serious stressors or even life-threatening illnesses. People who have such difficult and painful experiences may feel intense sadness or loss, anxiety, anger or a sense of abandonment, and may occasionally have the thought that they would be better off dead. In most people, however, these experiences do not trigger persistent ruminations of death or a genuine desire or plan to die. If such feelings are present, it suggests the person is suffering from depression or some other mental illness and should seek professional treatment.

**Q: Does asking someone if they're thinking about suicide plant the idea in the person's head?**

A: Asking about what someone is feeling doesn't create suicidal thoughts. Someone who is thinking about suicide may not admit it because they don't want to be stopped. But there is no evidence that people start thinking about suicide because someone has brought up the subject. If you suspect a friend or loved one is suicidal, take the initiative to ask what is troubling the person. Tell him or her that you are worried and that you want to help in any way possible. Don't be afraid to ask whether the person is considering suicide, or even if he or she has a particular plan or method in mind. Encourage the person to talk to a mental health professional.

**Q: What should I do if I encourage a depressed friend to get help but the person refuses?**

A: Sometimes the idea of going to a mental health professional may seem overwhelming to a depressed person. Giving your friend information about the University Counselling Services or a mental health professional in the community may be an important support. Offering to go with your friend to the first visit may also be helpful. If your friend appears to be in a crisis and is unwilling to get treatment, talk

to a mental health professional or someone who is in a position to help.

**Q: What do I do if someone close to me tells me he or she is thinking about suicide?**

A: If someone tells you they're thinking about suicide, don't attempt to argue the person out of it. Avoid the temptation to say, "You have so much to live for," or "Think about how that will hurt your family." You might say, "Things must really be awful for you to be feeling that way," and encourage your friend to talk to you about what he or she is feeling. Let the person know that that he or she can be helped and that you will support them in finding help. If someone talks about an actual suicide plan and seems intent on carrying it out, do not leave the person alone. Call for assistance from a responsible adult. Remove any firearms, drugs or sharp objects that could be used in a suicide attempt. If you are unable to get assistance, take your friend to a counsellor, or hospital emergency room.

*Adapted from: American Foundation for Suicide Prevention at [http://www.afsp.org/files/College\\_Film//](http://www.afsp.org/files/College_Film//)*

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## **A CRY FOR HELP: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW TO HELP A FRIEND WHO HAS SUICIDAL FEELINGS**

