

The Myths of Suicide

Common myths about suicide seldom change because people are afraid to talk about it. We should all look examine the thoughts and perceptions about suicide, because changing our attitudes could mean saving a life.

MYTH: Suicide happens without warning.

Most people show warning signs of how they are feeling about their life. These warning signs are invitations for others to offer help. Warning signs that a person might be feeling suicidal can be direct statements of wanting to die, physical signs like a change in appearance, emotional reactions or behavioural cues. People usually give some sign that they are thinking about suicide as an answer to problems they may be facing.

MYTH: People who are suicidal have decided they want to die.

Most of the time, people who are feeling suicidal have a wish to be helped. As we just learned, in most cases people give some sign that they are considering suicide, because they still have undecided feelings about dying. This is why it is so important to listen, and if you hear thoughts about suicide being expressed, check it out with the person.

MYTH: Talking about suicide will make someone attempt it.

Talking about suicide does not create or increase the risk of suicide. It actually reduces it. The best way to tell if there is a possibility of suicide is to ask directly. Talking openly and honestly without judging a person is a source of relief, and is often the key to preventing the immediate risk of suicide. When the topic of suicide is avoided, especially if that person has given signs, the person will be left feeling more alone and afraid to ask someone else for help.

MYTH: Once a person attempts suicide, they won't do it again.

A large number of people who attempt suicide will attempt again. This should not be seen as behaviour just to get attention—it should be taken very seriously. The rate of suicide for those with previous attempts is 40 times higher than the general population.

The Suicide Resource Group, Wellington-Dufferin is dedicated to the reduction of suicide and suicidal behaviour and its impact on individuals, families, and communities.

If you find this fact sheet useful, please feel free to make copies and pass it along to others.
For more information about the Suicide Resource Group, please call 519-766-4450 x231

Myths Continued . . .

MYTH: They aren't the type to do something like attempt suicide.

There is no one type of person who attempts or completes suicide. This sort of myth assumes that there is something wrong with a person who is suicidal. We need to challenge those assumptions, because believing a statement like this could make us blind to warning signs. People who experience suicidal thoughts do not come from any one kind of family or part of society.

MYTH: Suicide is too complex an issue for me to deal with.

Suicide is a difficult issue to understand—there are no general rules that apply to all people. However, responding to suicidal behaviour in a person is no more difficult than responding to any other behaviour that a person might show. While seeing a specialist in mental health may be useful, many individuals die because support that was needed from an informal source (friend, family member, etc.) was not available or not offered. Don't be afraid to offer help even if you are feeling unsure.

MYTH: When a person feels better the suicide risk is over.

Feeling better could mean two very different things. It could mean that a decision has been made to live. It could mean a higher risk because a decision to die has been made. Open and direct discussion of suicide is the only way to tell what the change in mood or behaviour means. Don't take away resources or support until you know if the risk has increased or decreased.

MYTH: People who kill themselves are taking the easy way out.

Most people at risk of suicide are desperately looking for another way out—that's why they send out warning signs. Their own abilities to deal with life's difficulties have been overwhelmed. At this critical time they may not be able to bounce back and deal with the stresses in their life. Labelling or judging them in a negative way only makes it more difficult to reach out for support.