

MYTHS ABOUT DEPRESSION AND SUICIDE

Myths about depression and suicide often separate people from the effective treatments now available and prevent people from supporting suicide prevention efforts. School staff, students, and their parents need to know the facts. Some of the most common myths are:

MYTH: It's normal for teenagers to be moody; teens don't suffer from "real" depression.

FACT: Depression can affect people at any age or of any race, ethnicity, or economic group.

MYTH: Teens who claim to be depressed are weak and just need to pull themselves together. There's nothing anyone else can do to help.

FACT: Depression is not a weakness, but a serious health disorder. Both young people and adults who are depressed need professional treatment. A trained therapist or counselor can help them learn more positive ways to think about themselves, change behavior, cope with problems, or handle relationships. A physician can prescribe medications to help relieve the symptoms of depression. For many people, a combination of psychotherapy and medication is beneficial.

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

FACT: Almost everyone who dies by suicide has given some clue or warning. Do not ignore suicide threats. Statements like "You'll be sorry when I'm dead," or "I can't see any way out"-no matter how casually or jokingly said-may indicate serious suicidal feelings.

MYTH: Anyone who tries to kill themselves must be crazy.

FACT: Most suicidal people are not psychotic or insane. They may be upset, grief-stricken, depressed, or despairing, but extreme distress and emotional pain are not necessarily signs of mental illness.

MYTH: If a person is determined to kill themselves, nothing is going to stop them.

FACT: Even the most severely depressed person has mixed feelings about death, wavering until the very last moment between wanting to live and wanting to die. Most suicidal people do not want death; they want the pain to stop. The impulse to end it all, however overpowering, does not last forever.

MYTH: People who complete suicide are people who were unwilling to seek help.

FACT: Studies of suicide victims have shown that more than half had sought medical help within six months before their deaths.

MYTH: Talking about suicide may give someone the idea.

FACT: You don't give a suicidal person morbid ideas by talking about suicide. The opposite is true. Bringing up the subject of suicide and discussing it openly is one of the most helpful things you can do. There is no evidence that screening youth for suicide induces suicidal thinking or behavior.