

Preventing Suicide is Everyone's Business – Here is how you can help

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It is hard to find anyone whose life has not been touched by suicide. But, no one likes to talk about. It is especially difficult for those who have been directly affected by suicide.

In 2017, 47,173 Americans died by suicide (American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and CDC). People are often relieved to learn that New Jersey ranks 49th in the country for rates of suicides. But that is still equivalent to 1 death every 11 hours in the state. And, that is significant. In fact, every life lost to suicide is significant. Did you know that suicide results in more deaths than war, homicide and natural disasters combined?

It affects people from all walks of life - from farmers to scientists to physicians including psychiatrists. It cuts across all races, genders, religious beliefs, economic and social status, and ethnic backgrounds.

There is a common myth among both the uneducated and the educated, including physicians, that suicide cannot be prevented. This is simply wrong. Their argument is that

if someone is going to die by suicide that person will die anyway. In other words, their perception is that efforts to save that life are not worth it or not possible. Even though the statistics show that over 42,000 people die by suicide each year, it is very important to remember that there are many more that attempt and survive.

This is just one misperception about suicide. There are many other myths about suicide. Let us discuss a few of these.

Myth #1: If someone is really suicidal, they are probably going to kill themselves at some point no matter what you do.

Fact: Suicide is preventable. Most people are suicidal only for a short period of time. So, helping someone through a suicidal crisis can be life-saving. Did you know that research has found that over 90% of the most serious attempters do not go on to die by suicide?

Myth #2: Asking a depressed person about suicide may put the idea in their head.

Fact: Asking about suicide does not amount to suggesting suicide or increasing the likelihood of suicide. In fact, asking might open up a dialogue

and a feeling of relief rather than an intrusion. It can help save a life. The risk is in NOT ASKING when it is appropriate to ask.

Myth #3: Someone making suicidal threats won't really do it, they are just looking for attention.

Fact: Those who talk about suicide or express thoughts about wanting to die are at risk for suicide and need your attention. 80% of people who die by suicide give some indication or warning. Take all threats of suicide seriously. Even if you think they are just "crying for help"—a cry for help, is a cry for help—so help!

Myth #4: If you stop someone from killing themselves one way, they'll probably find another.

Fact: This is not true. Reducing a suicidal person's access to highly lethal means e.g., firearms has strong evidence as effective suicide prevention strategy.

Myth #5 There's no point in asking about suicidal thoughts...if someone is going to do it, they won't tell you.

Fact: Often a suicidal individual is relieved when asked about suicidal thoughts. Some believe that those who choose suicide cannot help it or

prevent it. That is not true. Most suicidal people (about 95%) have mixed feelings about taking their own life. Part of them wants to die by suicide. Another part wants to live.

Multiple studies have found that over 90% of the most serious attempters do not go on to die by suicide.

There are some factors that increase suicide risk and there are others that decrease the risk. Some of the factors that increase suicide risk are severe mental illness especially depression, hopelessness, history of suicide in the family, alcohol or drug abuse, access to a firearm, and severe stress.

One of the biggest risk factors is untreated mental illness. 90% of individuals who die by suicide have untreated mental illness - 60% have depression (Adam Lasser, LCSW, Columbia University). Seeking psychiatric help when needed can help save a life. Remember, seeking treatment is a sign of strength and not weakness. Other ways of decreasing suicide risk are:

- Avoid abusing alcohol or drugs.
- Avoid isolating yourself. Stay connected with friends, family, and community.



Continued on Page #29

Preventing Suicide ... Continued from Page# 9

- Manage stress effectively when it cannot be prevented.

Despair is temporary. Suicide is permanent. Talking with someone about your thoughts and feelings can save your life. If you're thinking about suicide, or are worried about a friend or loved one, or would like emotional support, the Lifeline network is available 24/7 across the United States. Remember, suicide is preventable! The phone number for National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is 1-800-273-TALK (8255). You will be connected to a trained crisis worker in your area 24/7 to help during the crisis. Life-

line is free and confidential and is available to everyone.

You can learn more about risks of suicide and how to prevent by attending the workshop on January 22nd. You can register online for Suicide Prevention Workshop: <https://samhin.org/events/> (look for the Suicide Prevention Workshop in events).

SAMHIN, South Asian Mental Health Initiative & Network, is a non-profit organization that strives to address the mental health needs of the South Asians.

