College Students & Suicide

Myth or Fact?

■ Asking a person if he/she is thinking about suicide will put the idea into his/her head.
■ Once a person decides to commit suicide there is no way of stopping him/her.
■ Suicide happens without warning.
■ People who think about or commit suicide are all mentally ill.

Here are the facts:

■ All of the above are myths about suicide.
■ Discussing the problem openly shows the suicidal person that someone cares and wants to help.
■ Most suicidal people are ambivalent about living or dying.
■ Many of the people who attempt or commit suicide have shown some warning sign(s).
■ People who are suicidal are not necessarily mentally ill. Each individual is unique; there is no single reason why people kill themselves. Factors that may contribute to a student having suicidal thoughts include:
  ■ Major life transition, such as loss of a loved one, breaking up with a boyfriend/girlfriend, moving to a new town or school, failing an exam or course, not getting into one's choice of major, etc. These major life changes can cause a college student to feel unloved, depressed, isolated, and lonely.
  ■ Feelings of hopelessness and helplessness: when it feels as if no matter what one does things do not seem to be getting better and no one seems to care or help.
  ■ Negative feelings about oneself. A student may not be meeting their academic and social expectations.
  ■ Feelings of worthlessness and of being a failure may be experienced.
  ■ Wanting to end psychological pain that seems unbearable.
■ Alcohol and substance abuse can cause a student to lose self control and engage in impulsive suicidal behaviors.

What are warning signs of suicide?

Verbal warning signs may include negative statements such as:

■ "Families, friends, instructors, and classmates do not care."
■ "Life isn't worthwhile."
■ "People are better off without me."
■ "Everything seems to be going wrong."
■ "I don't know how much longer I can take this."

Non-verbal warning signs may include:

■ Giving away personal or prized possessions.
■ Increased alcohol or drug use.
■ Sleeping too much or too little.
■ Lack of interest in personal appearance.
■ Lack of interest in friends.
Lack of interest in social activities that were formerly of interest.

- Poor performance in school.
- Boredom, restlessness, and loss of concentration.

Please note that many of these are also signs of depression. While depression increases the risk for suicide, not everyone who is depressed is suicidal.

**How can you help?**

If someone tells you they are thinking about suicide, it is important to listen non-judgmentally, take their distress seriously, and help them get to a professional for evaluation and treatment. If someone is in imminent danger of harming him or herself do not leave the person alone. If it feels like an emergency, call 911.

**If you’re thinking about suicide...**

Let someone know what you are thinking, preferably a professional. Just because you can’t think of a solution doesn’t mean that a solution doesn’t exist. Know that you are not alone and that help is available. Contact us at the Counseling Center, AUD 854 or ROB 114, or call 312-341-3548.