

Myths and facts about suicide

While we present the most common myths about suicide here, Thomas Joiner's (2010) text, *Myths About Suicide*, is the most comprehensive review of myths available; you can hear Joiner speak about these myths in a 50-minute video available on YouTube (<http://youtu.be/-EKve7ZsGxE>).

Myth: If I ask a student about suicidal ideation I will put the idea in her head

Fact: Asking someone about suicide will not make him or her suicidal. If I asked you, "Have you had thoughts of speeding through an active school zone?" I would not increase the likelihood that you would speed through an active school zone. If you were thinking about it, it might make you stop and think. In fact, there is some evidence to suggest that for students who are suicidal, being asked about it actually reduces suicide risk (Gould et al., 2005). Asking about it also allows the student to see that you are comfortable discussing it and that you are therefore a *safe* person to share their thoughts with as you are open to this conversation and will not judge them.

Myth: If a student really wants to die by suicide there is nothing I can do about it.

Fact: We can prevent suicide deaths. Addressing underlying psychopathology, improving social connectedness (peers and parents), use of medication when appropriate, and developing coping skills and a positive school environment are just a few of the ways that we can prevent suicide. Even students at the highest risk for suicide still have part of them that wants to live.

Myth: My student is not at risk for suicide because he just signed a no-harm contract, he is a football player with a big game this weekend, and we had a really connecting conversation.

Fact: No-harm contracts, as opposed to safety plans, have no clinical value. Being an athlete or having a big event in the near future does not protect someone from suicide. Actually, being a star athlete in a highly competitive, time-consuming sport can serve as a barrier to connecting with peers and caring adults. Finally, as great as you are, having a really connecting conversation will not keep someone from dying by suicide. Future orientation, feeling valued and connected with others, and having safe adults to talk to are all factors that can increase the likelihood of safety, but none are guarantees that someone will not die by suicide.

Myth: Students who talk about suicide all of the time are not serious about suicide.

Fact: Students who talk about suicide are, more likely than not, indeed suicidal. Most people who die by suicide tell others. If it is a cry for help, then let it be a cry for help and let's get them the help they may need.