

Box 1: WHO myths and facts about suicide

Myth Most suicides happen suddenly without warning.

Fact The majority of suicides have been preceded by warning signs, whether verbal or behavioural. Of course there are some suicides that occur without warning. But it is important to understand what the warning signs are and look out for them.

Myth Someone who is suicidal is determined to die.

Fact On the contrary, suicidal people are often ambivalent about living or dying. Someone may act impulsively and die a few days later, even though they would have liked to live on. Access to emotional support at the right time can prevent suicide.

Myth Once someone is suicidal, he or she will always remain suicidal.

Fact Heightened suicide risk is often short-term and situation-specific. While suicidal thoughts may return, they are not permanent and an individual with previously suicidal thoughts and attempts can go on to live a long life.

Myth Only people with mental disorders are suicidal.

Fact Suicidal behaviour indicates deep unhappiness but not necessarily mental disorder. Many people living with mental disorders are not affected by suicidal behaviour, and not all people who take their own lives have a mental disorder.

Myth Talking about suicide is a bad idea and can be interpreted as encouragement.

Fact Given the widespread stigma around suicide, most people who are contemplating suicide do not know who to speak to. Rather than encouraging suicidal behaviour, talking openly can give an individual other options or the time to rethink his/her decision, thereby preventing suicide.

Source: Preventing suicide: a global imperative. World Health Organization 2014