



## **THE IRISH ASSOCIATION OF SUICIDOLOGY**

### **RISK FACTORS AND MYTHS ABOUT SUICIDE**

Because suicide is such a taboo and complex subject, it is surrounded by a great deal of confusion and misunderstanding. Below is a list of the most common misconceptions about suicide that we are aware of, along with the truth.

#### **MYTH:**

‘If someone is going to kill themselves, there is nothing you can do about it’

#### **FACT:**

If you can offer appropriate help and emotional support to people who are experiencing deep unhappiness and distress then you can reduce their risk of dying by suicide.

#### **MYTH:**

‘Suicidal people are fully intent on dying’

#### **FACT:**

Suicide is not a lifestyle choice and it’s dangerous to make it sound like one. The majority of people who die by suicide are ambivalent about living or dying and many who experience suicidal thoughts don’t really want to die. They can’t see a way to go on living with their emotional distress.

#### **MYTH:**

‘Talking about suicide encourages it’

#### **FACT:**

On the contrary, talking about suicide in a restrained, educating and informing way will not lead to its normalisation’ or encourage people to think of taking their lives. To ignore it or hide the situation even for honourable motives – is stigmatising and damaging. Samaritan’s helpline gives people the opportunity to talk about suicidal feelings, exploring their most feared emotions. This is a lifeline and an opportunity to consider healthier strategies for dealing with emotional crisis. Not to talk about suicide makes it much harder for someone to open up about their feelings and could prevent them finding a way forward.

#### **MYTH:**



‘Those who talk about suicide are the least likely to attempt it’

**FACT:**

Research shows that a high percentage of people who go on to attempt to complete suicide will have mentioned their intention, even in a light-hearted manner, to significant others in their lives in the month prior to embarking on this course of action.

**MYTH:**

‘Suicide attempts are just cries for help – it’s a form of attention seeking.’

**FACT:**

Those who have attempted suicide are 100 times more likely than the general population to actually die by suicide within a year of self harming. Approximately four out of ten people who take their own life will have attempted suicide earlier.

**MYTH:**

‘Only mentally ill/clinically depressed people make serious attempts at suicide.’

**FACT:**

Although the majority of people who end their lives by suicide are judged to have had some sort of psychiatric illness, often undiagnosed in their lifetime, feelings of desperation, helplessness and hopelessness are better indicators of possible future suicide.

**MYTH:**

‘A good pumping out in the A&E will teach those who make silly gestures a lesson they won’t forget’

**FACT:**

An unsympathetic response by those in a position to help leads to a missed opportunity for therapeutic intervention. It may lead to those at risk choosing a more certain method next time. An attempted suicide should always be taken seriously.

**MYTH:**

‘Once a person is suicidal, they are suicidal forever’

**FACT:**



Suicidal feelings and suicidal intent are often of short duration and vary in intensity over time. Alcohol and drugs impact very directly on suicidal thoughts and behaviour in the short term. People can and do feel very differently about suicide if they receive time and space where they feel accepted and supported to examine all their options.

**MYTH:**

‘Suicide can be a blessed relief not just for the individual but for those that surround him or her’

**FACT:**

The effects of suicide should not be trivialised in this way. The loss of a loved one is the start of a nightmare, not the end. It leaves profound feelings of loss, grief and guilt in its wake.

**MYTH:**

‘She killed herself because of exam stress’

**FACT:**

No one takes their life for one single reason. Each person makes decisions based on an individual set of circumstances unique to them. It is not accurate to attribute the cause of suicide to one factor alone.

**Risk Factors for Suicide**

- ❖ Easy access to means of ending one’s life by suicide
- ❖ A history of psychiatric illness particularly major depression
- ❖ A previous suicide attempt
- ❖ A history of suicide in the family
- ❖ A history of personality or behaviour disorder
- ❖ Drug or alcohol abuse
- ❖ Family breakdown or conflict and other relationship breakdown
- ❖ Physical or sexual abuse
- ❖ Absence of a confiding relationship
- ❖ Unemployment
- ❖ Physical illness