

**Bullying, Mental Health and Suicide
"Myth-information"**

**Let's Do Some Myth
Busting!**

John Plonski - Facilitator
Suicide Prevention Center of New York
Director of Training
IMAlive National Hopeline Network
jplonskist@gmail.com

"Myth-information" or Fact?

Psychiatric disorders are not true medical illnesses like heart disease and diabetes. People who have a mental illness are just "crazy."

Brain disorders, like heart disease and diabetes, are legitimate medical illnesses. Research shows there are genetic, environmental and biological causes for psychiatric disorders, and they can be treated effectively.

"Myth-information" or Fact?

Suicide can't be prevented. If someone is set on taking their own life, there is nothing that can be done to stop them.

Suicide is preventable. The vast majority of people contemplating suicide don't really want to die. They are seeking an end to intense mental and/or physical pain. Most have a mental illness. Interventions can save lives.

"Myth-information" or Fact?

People with a serious mental illness, such as schizophrenia, are usually dangerous and violent.

Statistically the incidence of violence in people with a brain disorder is not much higher than the general population's. Those with a psychosis are more often frightened, confused and despairing than violent. In fact, people with mental illnesses are much more likely to be the victims of crime.

"Myth-information" or Fact?

Mental illness is the result of bad parenting.

Experts agree that a genetic susceptibility, combined with other risk factors, leads to a psychiatric disorder. In other words, mental illnesses have a physiological cause.

"Myth-information" or Fact?

People who take their own life are selfish, cowards, weak or are just looking for "attention."

More than 90% of people who take their own life have at least one treatable mental illness such as depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia and/or alcohol and substance abuse. With better recognition and treatment many suicides can be prevented.

"Myth-information" or Fact?

Adolescents can't have depression. They are just moody.

Experts agree that a genetic susceptibility, combined with other risk factors, leads to a psychiatric disorder. In other words, mental illnesses, like depression, have a physiological cause.

"Myth-information" or Fact?

Bullying isn't serious. It's just a matter of kids being kids.

Bullying can be extremely serious affecting academic performance, mental and physical health of those who are targeted leaving long-lasting emotional scars. Research suggests that adults bullied as children are more likely than their non-bullied peers to be depressed and have low self-esteem.

"Myth-information" or Fact?

Depression results from a personality weakness or character flaw. People who are depressed should just snap out of it!

Depression has nothing to do with being lazy or weak. It results from changes in brain chemistry or brain function, and medication and/or psychotherapy often help people to recover.

"Myth-information" or Fact?

Asking someone if they are thinking about suicide will put the idea in their head and cause them to act on it.

When you fear someone you know is in crisis or depressed, asking them if they are thinking about suicide can actually help. By giving a person an opportunity to open up and share their troubles you can help alleviate their pain and find solutions.

"Myth-information" or Fact?

Depression is a normal part of the aging process.

Depression is not part of the aging process. However, adolescents and the elderly can have depression and they and their family members should seek professional help if they suspect depression.

"Myth-information" or Fact?

Bullied kids need to learn how to deal with bullying on their own.

Children shouldn't be expected to "deal with" bullying on their own. Bullying is a form of peer abuse and those who are bullied are victims. Society believes victims of other types of abuse deserve help and so do those who are bullied.

"Myth-information" or Fact?

Mental illnesses do not affect children or adolescents. Any problems they have are just a part of growing up.

Just like adults, children and adolescents develop mental illnesses. One in ten youth has a mental disorder. However, only about 20 percent of these children receive needed treatment.

"Myth-information" or Fact?

Barriers on bridges, safe firearm storage and other actions to reduce access to lethal methods of suicide don't work. People will just find another way.

Limiting access to lethal methods of suicide is one of the best strategies for suicide prevention. Separating someone at risk from a lethal method (e.g., a firearm) gives them time to change their mind and resolve the crisis or time for someone to intervene.

"Myth-information" or Fact?

Most children and youth who observe bullying don't want to get involved.

Most children and youth think bullying is wrong and that they should do something if they see it happen. However, they aren't sure what to do or say. It is important that adults provide a range of realistic, safe and effective options for action

"Myth-information" or Fact?

Addiction is a lifestyle choice. People with a substance abuse problem are morally weak or "bad".

Addiction is a disease that generally results from changes in brain chemistry. It has nothing to do with being a "bad" person.

"Myth-information" or Fact?

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

Those who talk about suicide or express thoughts about wanting to die, are at risk and need your attention. Most people who die by suicide give some indication or warning. Take all threats of suicide seriously!

"Myth-information" or Fact?

Schizophrenia means split personality, and there is no way to control it.

Often confused with multiple personality disorder schizophrenia is a disorder that prevents clear and logical thinking. Symptoms range from social withdrawal to hallucinations and delusions. Medication helps many to lead fulfilling, productive lives.

"Myth-information" or Fact?

Only a professional can help the person at risk of dying by suicide.

While the person at risk of suicide may need professional help, anyone trained to be "Suicide Aware" can help that person to keep safe! To create a Suicide Safe School everyone in the school community should be trained to be Suicide Aware.

"Myth-information" or Fact?

Bullying is the same thing as conflict.

Any two people can have a conflict, but bullying is a result of a power imbalance where one child has a hard time defending themselves. Trying to "resolve" bullying as if it is a conflict sends the message that both parties are to blame. That is not the appropriate message because in cases of bullying someone is being victimized.

"Myth-information" or Fact?

If you have a mental illness, you can tough it out or will it away. Being treated for a psychiatric disorder means you failed or are weak.

Like any serious illness, mental illness cannot be willed away. Ignoring the problem does not make it go away, either. It takes courage and strength to seek professional help.

"Myth-information" or Fact?

People with mental illnesses cannot tolerate the stress of holding down a job or attending school.

All jobs are stressful to some extent. Employers who have hired people with mental illnesses report good attendance and punctuality as well as motivation, good work, and job tenure on par with or greater than other employees or students.

"Myth-information" or Fact?

The most suicide attempts take place during the holiday season.

The CDC reports that the suicide rate is, in fact, the lowest in December. The rate peaks in the spring and the fall. This pattern has not changed in recent years. More importantly, statistics aside, we must always be aware **any person can be at risk at any time of the year.**

"Myth-information" or Fact?

Therapy and self-help are a waste of time. Why bother when you can just take a pill?

Treatment varies with the individual. People work with therapists, counselors, friends, psychologists, psychiatrists, nurses, and social workers during recovery as well as self-help and community supports. Often they combine these with available medications.

"Myth-information" or Fact?

Mental illnesses can't affect me.

Mental illnesses are surprisingly common and can affect almost every family. Roughly 5% of the population has a mental illness severe enough to require treatment. Mental illnesses do not discriminate - they can affect anyone.

"Myth-information" or Fact?

Suicide can't affect me.

Thoughts of suicide common among the population and can affect any person. It is estimated that 5% of the population has thoughts of suicide during any two week period. Suicidal thoughts do not discriminate - they can affect anyone.

"Myth-information" or Fact?

I can't do anything for a person with mental illness!

You can do a lot, starting with how you act and speak.

- Don't label people with words like "crazy", "nuts", "wacko", or "loony".
- Don't define people by their diagnosis. For example a person is not "a schizophrenic" they "have schizophrenia".

- Examine your own attitudes about bullying, mental illness and suicide and how they affect your interactions with others.
- Learn the facts about bullying, mental health and suicide and share them with others – Be a Myth-buster not a Myth-information spreader!
- Be willing to help those who are bullied, have mental illnesses or are at risk – Someday they may be the person who will help you!
- Remember - If some one has a mental health disability *it does not mean they have no abilities!*



Any questions?

For more information go to:
<http://www.preventsuicideny.org/>

John Plonski
jplonskisist@gmail.org