

answers to some common questions about suicide



Question 1. Does asking someone if they are thinking about suicide put the idea in their head?

No, talking about suicide does not encourage someone to take their own life. People who are thinking about suicide may not know who to speak to or feel worried that they would be judged. Rather than encouraging suicidal behaviour, talking openly about it can help a person open up about their feelings and give them the time to rethink their decision, thereby preventing suicide.

2. Do people who experience suicidal thoughts or die by suicide have a mental illness?

Many people living with mental illnesses do not experience suicidal thoughts, and not all people who attempt or die by suicide have a mental illness. In India, stress related to relationships, sociocultural and economic factors are leading reasons for suicide among young people.

3. Why don't individuals with suicidal thoughts reach out for help?

A person who has thoughts of suicide is likely to experience intense hopelessness and helplessness, which might

make it hard for them to reach out. They might also fear that reaching out for support won't help as they might get judged or the other person won't understand their experiences. Silence and stigma around suicide might make it even harder. So, it's important to extend support when you recognise warning signs in someone.

4. Is a suicide attempt a sign of the person's weakness or cowardice to handle their problems?

Experiencing thoughts or intent to attempt suicide is not a marker of weakness or lack of strength. People who attempt suicide are under immense stress who might not have access to support or care. Further, they might not have the resources to manage their stress by themselves.

5. Is someone with suicidal thoughts determined to die?

People who experience thoughts of suicide are often undecided about living or dying. Signs of suicidal thoughts are an indicator of deep emotional pain. Someone thinking about ending their life might find it difficult to see a way out of their painful situation. However, with adequate

support, they may want to overcome their suicidal feelings or find ways to cope with their situation. This is why providing the right kind of support at the right time is important to prevent the person from acting on these thoughts.

6. Is attempt to suicide still punishable by law in India?

Attempting suicide is not a criminal offence. India's Mental Healthcare Act (2017) has decriminalised attempt to suicide due to severe stress. It acknowledges that people who attempt or die of suicide are under severe stress. The Act also contains provisions that offer care, treatment and rehabilitation to someone who has attempted suicide. No legal action can be taken against anyone who has attempted suicide under severe stress.

7. What can I do to prevent suicides in young people?

Anyone and everyone can make a difference and contribute to suicide prevention.

Here are a few ways through which one can support those who are struggling with thoughts of suicide:

- **Learn the warning signs**

You can learn about the warning signs and risk factors to know what to look out for when a loved one is struggling.

- **Ask and listen**

You don't have to be a professional to ask someone if they're thinking about suicide and provide them a listening ear. Reaching out to someone who is struggling can help save lives and inspire hope.

- **Share messages of hope**

Share information that highlights that suicides are preventable and there is help available.

- **Share helpful information and resources**

You can share information about warning signs and prevention strategies to empower other people in situations where they feel helpless. You could also provide information about available support services.

- **Share your story**

You can share your own experience about over-coming suicidal thoughts and feelings. It can inspire hope in others to open up about their feelings and thoughts and reach out for support.

- **Volunteer your time**

You can volunteer to support our mission of suicide prevention by spreading awareness and breaking the stigma around suicide.

(Outlive is a suicide prevention programme for young people by Sangath, The Centre for Mental Health Law & Policy, and Quicksand. Learn more at www.outlive.in.)

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