Fact or Myth?

When dealing with the issue of suicide, it is best to separate fact from fiction. The following is a list of facts and myths about suicide compiled by Sol Gordon in his book, “When Living Hurts.”

**Myth:** Youth who talk about suicide rarely attempt it.
**Fact:** Most youth that attempt or complete suicide, have given verbal clues.

**Myth:** Discussing suicide issues will make it happen.
**Fact:** Talking about suicide does not place ideas into young people’s heads that were not already there. There is evidence that once a suicide occurs other attempts may follow as a contagious reaction to hopelessness.

**Myth:** The tendency towards suicide is inherited.
**Fact:** There is no evidence of a genetic link. However, a previous suicide in the family may establish a destructive model for dealing with stress and depression.

**Myth:** Teenage suicides happen at night.
**Fact:** Most teenage suicides occur between 3 and 6 PM, at home, presumably when the suicidal person can be seen and stopped.

**Myth:** Suicidal people leave notes.
**Fact:** Only a small percentage, about 15% leave notes.

**Myth:** If a person wants to complete suicide nothing can stop him/her.
**Fact:** Suicidal people have mixed feelings about death. They send out messages and clues that ask others to save or help them. No one is suicidal all the time. Many suicides can be prevented.

**Myth:** Youths who want to complete suicide are mentally ill.
**Fact:** Mental illness can increase the risk of suicide but most young people who attempt or complete suicide would not be diagnosed as “mentally ill.” Youth suicide is often a sudden and urgent reaction to cumulative events and stresses.

**Myth:** Once a teenager has been suicidal, he/she is never out of danger.
**Fact:** Many youths that have been depressed recover and lead normal healthy lives. They learn constructive rather than destructive ways to cope and handle feelings and disappointments. You can make a difference. In many schools and communities it is not a matter of whether you can or cannot, it is a matter of whether you will or will not.