

Language Matters: Talking About Suicide

When talking about suicide, it is important to use words that are neutral, factual and free from stigma – which is judgement or shame – about accessing care or being different due to mental health conditions. Doing this helps others talk about suicide more openly and safely and can lead people to seek help.



Talking About

Suicide Death

Suicide is the result of complex factors and should not be discussed as a “successful” event or as being “completed.” Using factual, neutral language may decrease the stigma associated with suicide. For example, the word “commit” implies that suicide is a criminal or immoral act.

Safe words: Died by suicide.

Words to avoid: Successful suicide, completed suicide, committed suicide.

Talking About

Suicide Attempts

It is important to not portray suicide as positive or negative. Remaining factual and neutral helps to decrease stigma. Referring to a suicide attempt as “unsuccessful” or “incomplete” implies that dying is the preferred outcome.

Safe words: Attempted suicide.

Words to avoid: Incomplete suicide, suicidal gesture, unsuccessful suicide, failed attempt, nonfatal suicide.

Talking About

Specific Populations

When discussing populations that may be at risk for suicide, it is important to use factual and neutral language. Some words carry negative meanings and increase stigma.

Safe words: Populations with higher rates of suicide, factors that may increase a person’s risk of suicide, social and economic risks of suicide.

Words to avoid: High-risk populations, vulnerable or susceptible people, the burden of suicide.

Talking About

People Impacted by Suicide

People who are bereaved by suicide and those who have survived a suicide attempt are greatly impacted by suicide. Use language that emphasizes the person and avoids labeling. Different people identify with different terms, so we can focus on generally accepted safe terms.

Safe words: Person bereaved by suicide, suicide loss survivor, suicide attempt survivor, person with lived experience.

IMPORTANT Keys to Safe Messaging

When discussing suicide:

- Always provide the number to a local and/or national suicide prevention help line so people know where to get help.
- Never include details about the suicide death, method of death, means used, location of death or the person who died.
- Always explain that suicide is due to complex issues that can affect anyone, and take all opportunities to point people toward available resources.



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