

Suicide Prevention

Safe Language Guide

This guide provides some practical tips on safe ways to discuss suicide to increase community understanding, while ensuring any risks are managed.

Certain ways of talking about suicide can alienate members of the community, sensationalise the issue or inadvertently contribute to suicide being presented as glamorous or as an option for dealing with problems. People who are vulnerable to suicide, or bereaved by suicide, can be particularly impacted by language.

Be mindful about language

- Avoid discussion of suicide method or location.
- Think about the audience and how information may be interpreted.
- When facilitating discussions, try to avoid placing any moral or judgemental value on the act of suicide. Be mindful about not placing expectations on people to disclose, and understand that they will participate at the level at which they feel safe.
- Discussions should be handled sensitively. Avoid asking confronting questions such as ‘what would you do?’ and instead phrase the question in a less personal way, such as ‘suppose this happened to someone...what could they do?’
- Check the accuracy of any information provided and use only reputable sources. Communicating unconfirmed, sensational or inaccurate information is unhelpful and potentially dangerous.
- Avoid judgemental or sensationalist language about suicide.

Don't say	Do say	Why?
‘unsuccessful suicide’, ‘failed suicide’ or ‘suicide bid’	‘non-fatal attempt’ or ‘made an attempt on their life’	To avoid presenting suicide as a desired outcome or glamourising a suicide attempt
‘successful suicide’	‘took their own life’, died by suicide’ or ‘ended their own life’	To avoid presenting suicide as a desired outcome
‘committed’ or ‘commit suicide’	‘died by suicide’ or ‘death by suicide’	To avoid association between suicide and crime or sin
‘suicide epidemic’	‘increasing rates’ or ‘higher rates’	To avoid sensationalism and inaccuracy

Reference: <https://mindframe.org.au/suicide/communicating-about-suicide/language>

