

# Talking Responsibly About Suicide

We recognize that the language we use matters to those around us.

We invite you to learn more about some terms to use and which terms to avoid surrounding suicide.

## How to Start the Conversation:

Talking about suicide directly will NOT give someone the idea to die by suicide. Direct conversations help people who are struggling with suicidal thoughts feel seen and supported.

## FOUR WAYS TO ASK ABOUT SUICIDE

1. You said you've been feeling hopeless lately. Can you tell me more what you mean when you say, "I just can't go on like this anymore"?
2. You don't seem like yourself. I'm wondering if you're thinking about suicide?
3. Feeling overwhelmed and stressed can be difficult to deal with. When you say you don't want to do this anymore, do you mean you're having thoughts of killing yourself?
4. You've been dealing with these feelings for a long time. I'm here to listen and support you. I care about you.

While some of these terms may not be things you typically say — this first phrase is a very important one to replace.

✗ **Committed Suicide**

✓ **Died by suicide, took their own life, or ended their life**

### WHY?

The word "commit" implies suicide is a crime or sin, reinforcing the idea that suicide is a selfish act and personal choice. Using phrases like "died by suicide" help remove the shame/blame element.

**ONE  
THING  
YOU CAN  
DO**

## More Phrases to Use and Avoid:

Swap some of these commonly used phrases to help shift the conversation around suicide.

**✗ (Name) is Suicidal**

- ✓ (Name) is facing suicide
- ✓ (Name) is suffering through suicidal thoughts
- ✓ (Name) is having thoughts of suicide

### WHY?

People aren't their illness; they have an illness.

**✗ Career/political suicide**

- ✓ End of their career

### WHY?

The word "suicide" shouldn't be used to describe things that are difficult, challenging or even terminal. There is a huge difference between someone damaging their career and someone killing themselves.

**✗ Suicide Epidemic**

- ✓ Increase in suicide

### WHY?

Using words like "epidemic" or "skyrocket" can create a sense of panic and make suicide seem inevitable or more common than it is. Use less emotionally charged terms to avoid imparting feelings of hopelessness.

**✗ Successful suicide**

- ✓ Fatal suicide attempt

**✗ Failed Suicide**

- ✓ Survived a suicide attempt
- ✓ non-fatal suicide attempt

### WHY?

"Successful" or "completed" frames a tragic outcome as something positive or an achievement. A suicide attempt is either fatal or not.

**✗ Copycat Suicide**

- ✓ Other people who are experiencing thoughts of suicide

### WHY?

The term "copycat" can imply immaturity, and that suicide is contagious. Instead, use words that can help eliminate that stigma.

**✗ High Risk Populations**

- ✓ Populations with high rates of suicide
- ✓ populations with higher risk of suicide

### WHY?

Use neutral, factual and respectful words when discussing a group's suicide risk.

## Get Help

If you're having thoughts of suicide or are worried about someone you love,

**HELP IS AVAILABLE.**

Call or text the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline at **988**, or chat at <https://988lifeline.org/chat/>