

The ways we talk about mental health and suicide are important! Not only is it important to avoid perpetuating stigma, but there are safety concerns involved. Dangerous phenomena, like suicide contagion, is a consequence of reporting and social media content that doesn't follow safe messaging guidelines. In an effort to keep our communities safe, please have the following in mind as you post and hold discussions:

● Include a Content Notice (CN)

When discussing sensitive topics like suicide, use a content notice (CN) or content warning (CW) to alert readers. This gives them the option to avoid the content and prevents accidental exposure.

● Limit Details

Avoid sharing specific details about suicide, such as personal information or suicide notes, as these can lead to over-identification and suggest viable methods to vulnerable individuals.

● Use Destigmatizing Language

Some language previously used to discuss mental health and suicide assigned blame to the individual, reinforced stigma, and/or perpetuated misinformation. For example, we now say “died by suicide” instead of “committed suicide” because “commit” may imply that an act is criminal. You can [read more about destigmatizing language use here](#).

● Use Safe Images

Refrain from posting images, photos, or videos depicting suicide or its methods, as they can trigger thoughts of suicide for at-risk individuals.

● Don't Oversimplify

Recognize the complexity of suicide and avoid simplifying its causes. Multiple factors, including mental health and life events, contribute to suicide. Blaming individuals or single events oversimplifies a complex issue.

● Provide Messages of Hope

Share messages of hope, emphasizing that suicide can be prevented and directing users to resources for help and support. Promote open discussions about mental health challenges and the importance of seeking assistance. Include a safety message, like the following:

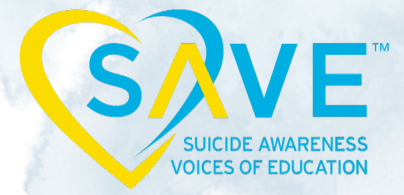
Help is always available! Call or text 988 to connect with the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. The Lifeline provides 24-hour, confidential support to anyone in suicidal crisis or emotional distress. Support is also available via live chat at 988lifeline.org

● Monitor Comment Sections

To the best of your capacity and ability, please monitor comments on social media for hurtful remarks and signs of suicidal ideation, removing or reporting inappropriate posts.

Content adapted from: Engelson, B. J., Bernstein, S. A., Moutier, C. Y., & Gold, J. A. (2023). Content Notice: Guidelines to Discuss Suicide on Social Media. *Missouri medicine*, 120(1), 15-20.

TALKING ABOUT SUICIDE



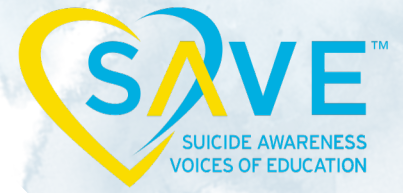
Many stigmatizing phrases and ways of talking about suicide have been ingrained into our vocabulary. The chart below provides examples of potentially harmful phrases and offers respectful alternatives. By using more thoughtful language, we can help change the way people facing suicide are understood and treated.

Instead of this...	Say this...	Why?
commit/committed suicide	died by suicide / death by suicide / lost their life to suicide	<p>“commit” implies suicide is a sin or crime, reinforcing the stigma that it’s a selfish act and personal choice</p> <p>using neutral phrasing like “died by suicide” helps strip away the shame/blame element</p>
successful/unsuccessful suicide completed/failed suicide	<p>died by suicide / survived a suicide attempt / lived through a suicide attempt</p> <p>fatal suicidal behaviour / non-fatal suicidal behaviour</p> <p>fatal suicide attempt / non-fatal suicide attempt</p>	<p>the notion of a “successful” suicide is inappropriate because it frames a very tragic outcome as an achievement or something positive</p> <p>to be matter-of-fact, a suicide attempt is either fatal or not</p>
epidemic, skyrocketing	rising, increasing	<p>words like “epidemic” can spark panic, making suicide seem inevitable or more common than it actually is</p> <p>by using purely quantitative, less emotionally charged terms like “rising”, we can avoid instilling a sense of doom or hopelessness</p>
“<Name> is suicidal”	“<Name> is facing suicide / is thinking of suicide / has suffered through suicidal thoughts / has experienced suicidal thoughts”	we don’t want to define someone by their experience with suicide; they are more than their suicidal thoughts
<p>“He’s suicidal “</p> <p>“They’re a schizophrenic”</p> <p>“She’s bipolar”</p> <p>The mentally ill</p> <p><Substance> addicts</p>	<p>“he is facing suicide / thinking of suicide / experiencing suicidal thoughts”</p> <p>“they have schizophrenia / are living with schizophrenia”</p> <p>people with mental illness</p> <p>people addicted to <Substance>/ people with addiction</p>	<p>putting the condition before the person reduces someone’s identity to their diagnosis– people aren’t their illness; they have an illness</p> <p>people-first language shows respect for the individual, reinforcing the fact that their condition does not define them</p>

Content adapted from: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. (n.d.). *Words matter: Learning how to talk about suicide in a hopeful, respectful way.* <https://www.camh.ca/-/media/files/words-matter-suicide-language-guide.pdf>

SAVE’s mission: To prevent suicide through education, advocacy, lethal means safety efforts and support for loss survivors.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR SAFE MESSAGING



To reduce stigma and minimize safety risks, the following organizations offer additional professional guidance for responsible communication.



**American
Foundation
for Suicide
Prevention**

The Media Resources Hub provides research-backed tools, guidelines, and case studies to help you create ethical, responsible, and impactful content.

<https://storytelling.afsp.org/media-resources>



**World Health
Organization**

The primary audience for this resource comprises professionals working directly in the media. More broadly, it is for all other stakeholders who communicate and message or speak publicly about suicide and suicide prevention.

<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240076846>



The Framework for Successful Messaging is a research-based resource that outlines four critical issues to consider when messaging to the public about suicide.

<https://suicidepreventionmessaging.org>

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