

Communicating Safely for Suicide Prevention

Talking with Others About Suicide



TexasSuicidePrevention.org
@StopTXSuicides

Communicating Safely When Talking About Suicide: Help Keep Texas Communities Suicide Safer

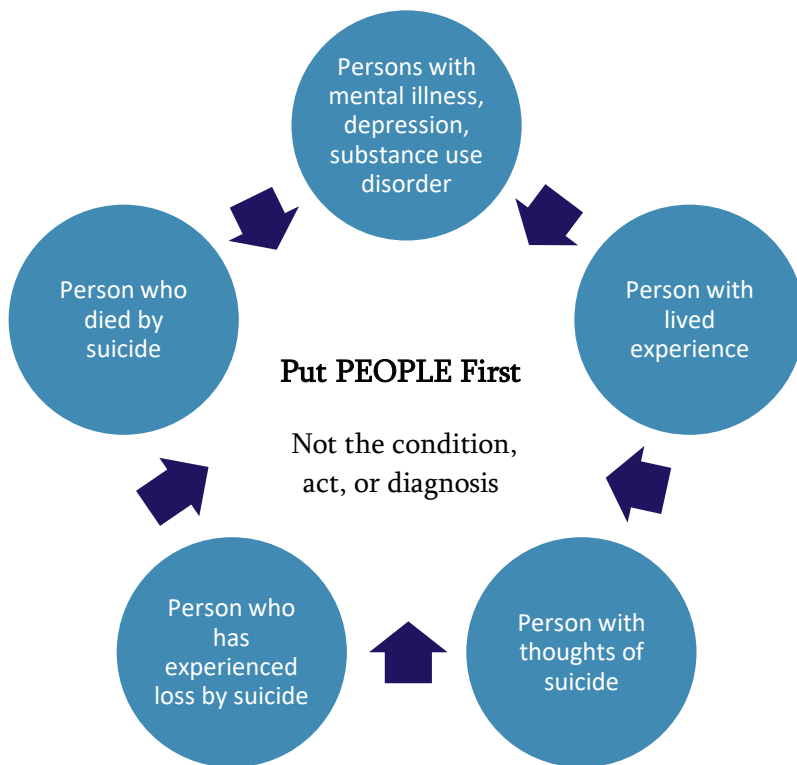
When discussing topics like mental health, trauma, and suicide, we need to consider that about half of any audience has some form of lived experience themselves or has a family member, colleague, neighbor, or community member who has lived experience.

Talking about suicide can be difficult, especially for those who have lived experience, trauma, or have experienced other challenging events in their lives. We also know how we talk about suicide affects others' willingness to reach out and seek help if they are struggling and impacts their healing and recovery journey.

As we prepare to participate in community conversations, this guide will help us adjust the way we talk about suicide to ensure all involved are supported in the best possible way.

Here are some tips to help us support ourselves and each other as we discuss this important topic:

1. Put PEOPLE First:



Using people-first language avoids stigmatizing words or phrases and emphasizes people, while respecting differences and experiences, rather than referring to their actions, conditions, or diagnoses.



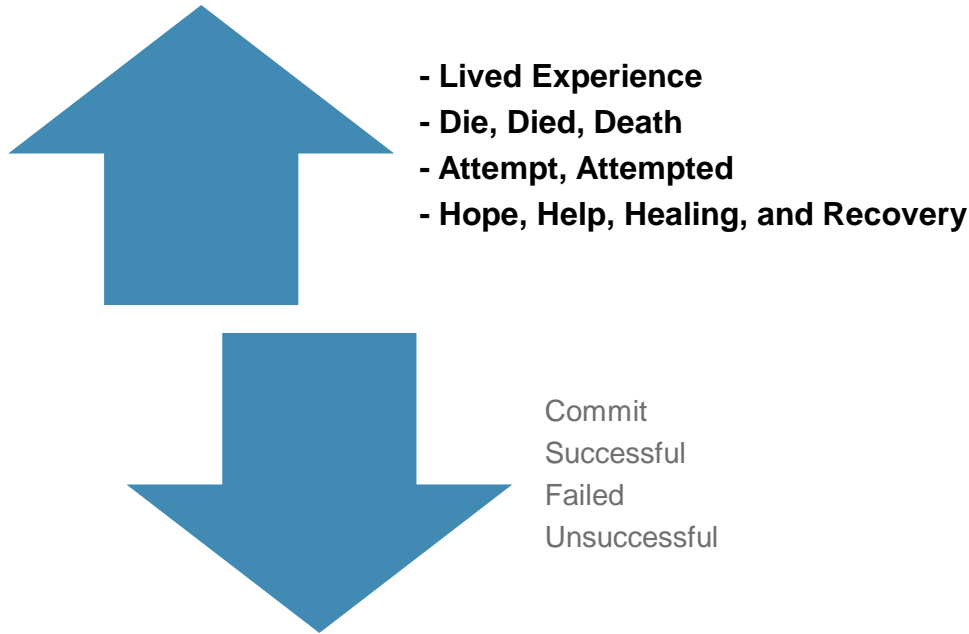
2. Safe Language Helps Communities Become Suicide Safer

It is important that language about suicide is considered carefully. Please take your time to help reduce the chance of an emotional response rather than a factual, whole community perspective.

When we replace unsafe language with neutral, respectful, public health language, we help shift how communities react to and understand suicide. We can make a difference by helping those around us feel supported and encouraged to reach out for help. For instance:

- The term ‘committed’ is stigmatizing as it implies someone is criminal or immoral. Suicide is not a crime. Think about it this way – would you say someone has committed cancer? Committed the flu?
- A suicide attempt is not about its “success” or “failure.” Language about suicide should be neutral, careful, and focused on hope, help, healing, and recovery. People die by suicide or attempt to die by suicide. People may have lived through a suicide attempt or been affected by someone else’s lived experience.
- Suicide is a tragic outcome of complex factors that have long term impacts on communities and people.

Help our communities to reduce stigmatizing language, while at the same time, increase community safety by showing others how to talk compassionately around topics like suicide.



Help increase the use of safe messaging and reduce the use of unsafe language

3. Help to Build Suicide Safer Communities

Remember the point of what you are trying to say and why you are saying it.

Language should always support those impacted by lived experience, first and foremost. Help to create solutions and improvements.

Communicate that suicide is a public health concern by talking about risk factors, warning signs, and protective factors that help us build resiliency, hope, and help-seeking in Texas communities.



Explain that suicide is complex and can affect anyone.

Convey the context of suicide by using factual statistics (from sources like the CDC or Texas Health and Human Services). Take time and do this right – the internet is not always your friend – especially on the topic of suicide.

Reduce sharing of descriptions of a death by suicide (for instance, how and where someone died by suicide) or personal information.

Ensure messaging is age, gender, and culturally appropriate.



Support persons with lived experience by considering the impact your words may have.

Use neutral, hopeful, life-affirming, and positive visuals to convey hope, help, and healing.

Provide
resources to find help in your
community.



4. Language to Avoid

- ⊘ Stigmatizing language that may stop others from seeking help or that does not show empathy and compassion for someone’s lived experience.
- ⊘ Language that emphasis the condition rather than the person - such as “mentally ill”, “addict”, “suicide victim”, “attempters.”
- ⊘ Avoid language that sensationalizes suicide. Words like “crisis” or “epidemic” for example. Talking about celebrity or other high-profile death by suicide without consideration of how others may be impacted. If you are discussing the above, always include the National Lifeline at 800-273-8255.

Learn More About Safe Suicide Prevention Communication

There are several resources that can help build your messaging approach. We encourage you to learn more! Please consult the following resources for helpful information about creating and sharing information about suicide.

One way to support suicide safer messaging is to consider becoming certified by SAVE to support safe messaging. To learn more about this program, go to:

<https://www.savecertified.org>

Language Matters: Safe Communication for Suicide Prevention (Canada)

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/healthy-living/language-matters-safe-communication-suicide-prevention.html>



Reporting on Suicide

<https://reportingonsuicide.org>

American Association of Suicidology

<https://suicidology.org/reporting-recommendations/>

National Action Alliance Safe Messaging

<https://theactionalliance.org/messaging>

Department of Veterans Affairs

https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/docs/OMH-086-VA-OMHSP-Safe-Messaging-Factsheet-4-9-2019.pdf

About the Texas Suicide Prevention Collaborative:

We exist to support Texas communities in their efforts to become suicide safer by supporting use of evidence-based, best practices that promote the public health approach to suicide prevention. By connecting Texas communities through local coalitions and other stakeholders, we can build and use vital resources more effectively and in a coordinated way.

To learn more, contact:

admin@texassuicideprevention.org or see our website:

TexasSuicidePrevention.org.