

# Language Matters: Spotlight on Suicide



Office of  
Mental Health



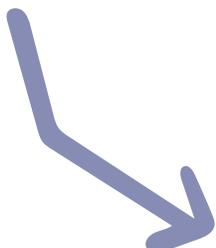
We recognize that the language we use matters to those around us.

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

## How to Start the Conversation:

Talking about suicide will **NOT** give someone the idea of suicide. Talking about it actually helps people who are struggling with suicidal thoughts feel seen and supported.

### 4 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 "what is the point of any of this?"

2.

I feel like you're questioning your life right now. Are you thinking about death or dying?

3.

Feeling overwhelmed and stressed can be so hard to deal with. When you say you don't want to do this anymore, do you mean you're having thoughts of ending your life?

4.

You've been dealing with these feelings for so long, and I completely understand that you're hurting. I'm here to listen and support you.

While some of these terms may not be things you typically say — **this first phrase is something we can all pledge to replace.**

- ✗ ~~Committed Suicide~~
- **Died by Suicide, Took their life, Ended their own 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.

## QUICK LANGAUGE SWAP



## Words 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.

**Use less emotionally charged terms to avoid a feeling 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

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- 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:**  
**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255 | Crisis Text Line: Text Got5 to 741741**