



Language guidelines

We want everyone to feel confident talking about suicide and part of that is making sure you are using the right language.

Many stigmatising phrases and ways of talking about suicide have been ingrained into everyday language. It's ok to slip up from time to time, but if you find yourself not using the right language, correct yourself out loud. By showing that it's important to change the words we use, you can turn the conversation into a positive learning experience for everyone involved.

The important thing to remember is that you are doing your best to offer a listening ear and support someone struggling with suicidal thoughts. Don't avoid conversations because you are concerned that you may say the wrong thing. This conversation may stop someone taking their life.

In addition to trying to say the right words remember to physically show you are listening to them too. Try to find a place to talk where you won't be disturbed, put your phone away so you can engage with the person fully, try not to cut short the conversation to rush off to another meeting. Remember to take time for yourself after offering support to someone who is thinking about suicide. You may need time to process the conversation you have had about suicide.

For more useful tips on how to talk about suicide, take part in [Zero Suicide Alliance's free 20-minute online training](#).

Avoid	Say	Why
Commit / committed suicide	Died by suicide Lost their life to suicide Took their own life	Using the word 'commit' implies suicide is a sin or crime, reinforcing the stigma that it's a selfish act and personal choice. It has not been a crime in England since 1961. Using neutral phrasing like 'died by suicide' helps remove shame or blame.
Successful suicide Completed suicide	Died by suicide Fatal suicide attempt	Saying 'successful' or 'completed' is inappropriate because it frames a very tragic outcome as an achievement or something positive.
Failed suicide attempt Unsuccessful suicide attempt	Suicide attempt Survived a suicide attempt	Saying 'failed' or 'unsuccessful' is inappropriate because it implies that the opposite would be a positive outcome.

	Non-fatal suicide attempt	
[Name] is suicidal	[Name] is thinking of suicide [Name] is feeling suicidal [Name] is experiencing suicidal thoughts or feelings	Try not to define someone by their experience with suicide. They are more than their suicidal thoughts.
Cry for help		Suicide attempts must be taken seriously. Describing an attempt as a 'cry for help' dismisses the intense emotional distress that someone may be experiencing.
You're not going to do anything silly are you? Are you thinking of ending it all? You're not going to top yourself, are you?	Are you having thoughts of suicide? Are you feeling suicidal? Have you been thinking about killing yourself?	You want to show that you are not going to dismiss or make fun of how they are feeling but instead you are prepared to talk about it and take it seriously. Ask open questions and not ones that require just a yes or no answer. It's important to be direct. Using the word suicide shows others that you are ok with them talking about suicidal feelings and that you are there to listen.
[Name] is feeling suicidal because of... They took their own life because...		Don't speculate on the reason someone may be experiencing suicidal thoughts or the reason they took their own life. The reasons for someone thinking of or taking their own life are usually very complex.