



How to Speak the Language of Trauma

When it comes to trauma, our language has the power to either validate or invalidate someone’s experiences. You may have heard the term “PTSD” (post-traumatic stress disorder) or “trauma” used casually or colloquially in a way that can trivialize the very real struggles faced by those who suffer from this condition — i.e. “I have PTSD from the twist ending of that TV show.” While there may be no ill will behind this language, it’s crucial to recognize that trauma is genuine mental health event with profound effects. We must take care to treat those experiencing symptoms of PTSD with compassion and understanding in how we speak about trauma. Encouraging individuals to seek treatment and supporting them in accepting their feelings as valid and worthy of attention is essential for their healing.

If you recognize someone is struggling, consider these tips when communicating with them:

- Use words like “trauma” and “PTSD” with care, avoiding contexts that might trivialize their true meaning.
- Ask for permission to talk about it.
- Resist prying for detailed information.
- Avoid reflexively saying “I’m sorry.”
- Help them accept that their feelings are valid.
- Express that it can get better with treatment, but acknowledge it may get worse first.
- Normalize their reaction and emotions.
- Anticipate any triggers.
- Don’t take their behavior personally.
- Let them know it’s okay to seek help and treatment.

If you expect someone may be at risk of harming themselves or others, seek emergency medical help. Call 911 or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline by dialing 988 (1-800-273-8255).

#HealTrauma

If you or someone you know is struggling with trauma, you can find additional resources through the National Center for PTSD, including the PTSD Coach mobile app. Veterans can contact the Veteran Crisis Line by dialing 988, then pressing 1.

