



A Guide to Speaking Sensitive About Suicide

Before you read: This content talks about suicide prevention. Some linked sources may include sensitive topics. Our goal is to raise awareness, promote prevention and care for readers' well-being.

The words we use matter. When talking about suicide, language can either build connection or increase isolation. Whether you are supporting someone you know, speaking at work or learning how to talk more carefully, choosing the right words can help save lives.

Why Careful Language Matters

How we talk about suicide can affect people deeply. Research shows that harmful or dramatic media coverage can increase suicide risk, especially for people who are already struggling (National Library of Medicine). Graphic or emotional language can trigger suicidal thoughts.

Because of this risk, groups like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, World Health Organization and Suicide Prevention Resource Center advise using clear, calm and respectful language. Treat suicide as a health issue, not as a moral or personal failure.

Words to Use and Words to Avoid

Some common phrases can cause harm, even when that is not the intent. The way we speak about suicide has also changed over the years. Here are safer options and why they matter.

Avoid...	Say...	Why it matters
"Committed/ completed suicide"	"Died by suicide"	"Committed" suggests a crime or wrongdoing. "Completed" can imply a task or goal to be achieved. Instead, suicide is a health crisis.
"Successful suicide"	"Death by suicide" or "suicide death"	The word "successful" can sound like approval or positive end to a goal, which is inappropriate.
"Failed suicide attempt"	"Survived a suicide attempt"	"Survived" centers life and recovery.
"Attention-seeking"	"In emotional pain" or "struggling"	Dismissive words reduce trust and increase shame.
"Suicidal person"	"Person experiencing suicidal thoughts"	Person-first language reduces stigma and reminds us this is not an identity.

[More on Page 2](#)



How to Ask without Causing Harm

Many people worry that asking about suicide will put the idea in someone's head. Asking in a calm and caring way does not cause harm. What matters is how you ask.

Speak clearly and without judgment. Stay calm. If someone shares thoughts of suicide, listen more than you talk. Do not act shocked or dismiss their feelings. Let them know they are not alone.

Most important, help them find support. Stay with them if possible and guide them to a trusted person, mental health professional or crisis line.

Language Can Protect Lives

Changing how we speak is a simple but powerful step. Kind and respectful language helps lower stigma and makes it easier for people to ask for help.

Putting the person first matters. A single caring phrase can help someone feel safe enough to reach out. Words may seem small, but they can make a life-saving difference.

#StopSuicide

If someone is in crisis, encourage them to call the **Suicide and Crisis Lifeline** at 988 or 800-273-8255. Help is free, private and available all day, every day.

Reviewed by Clinical Consultant, LMHC.

Call 911 if someone is in immediate danger or a life-threatening emergency requiring immediate physical intervention. If you or someone you know is struggling emotionally, feeling overwhelmed, anxious, hopeless, in crisis, or simply needs someone to talk to, call or text 988 for free, confidential support 24/7. The 988 Lifeline is available to anyone in the United States or U.S. territories. People do not have to be suicidal or in immediate danger to call or text 988. There is also a chat feature available on 988lifeline.org. Lucet members can contact us to connect with free resources and find care.

