



HOW TO TALK ABOUT SUICIDE: A QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

Speaking about suicide presents numerous opportunities to individuals and organizations, including increasing safety, reducing stigma, establishing credibility on the topic, or just educating the public. If we are going to succeed in lowering military and veteran suicide rates, it’s important to talk about suicide openly, knowledgeably, respectfully, and safely. The following guidelines will help.



BEFORE YOU SPEAK, KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE AND MESSAGING GOALS.

| Key Audiences | Messaging Goals |
|-----------------|-----------------------|
| At-risk persons | → Keep safe |
| Survivors | → Destigmatize |
| Professionals | → Burnish credibility |
| General public | → Educate |

SAFETY, IS ABOVE ALL, THE MOST IMPORTANT CONCERN WHEN TALKING ABOUT SUICIDE.

- **Anyone** you speak to could be at risk.
- When in doubt, remember **The Golden Rule**.
- Expect **unexpected conversations** to occur. Be ready.

SOME BASIC SAFETY GUIDELINES:

| Avoid saying | Say instead |
|----------------------|--|
| “Committed suicide” | → “Died by suicide” |
| “Successful attempt” | → “Suicide death” |
| “Failed attempt” | → “Suicide attempt” |
| “22 veterans a day” | → “Just under 20 service members and veterans a day” |

- **Don’t overshare** details of other suicides like **means, location, or vivid imagery**.
- **Don’t sensationalize, glamorize, romanticize, or normalize** suicide.
- **Don’t speculate** on or **oversimplify the cause of a suicide death**.
- **Don’t** refer to a suicidal attempt or act as **“selfish,” “stupid,” or “crazy.”**

HOW YOU TALK ABOUT SUICIDE IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN WHAT YOU SAY.

- Speaking **openly** and **confidently breaks taboos** and **reduces stigma**.
- Be mindful of your **body language, eye contact, and emotional cues**.
- Stay **calm, be compassionate, listen, and act**.
- **Don’t whisper** or speak in **hushed tones**.
- **Don’t** speak in **euphemisms** or beat around the bush.
- It’s okay to say the word **“suicide”** out loud.

STAY HOPEFUL. PROVIDE RESOURCES.

- Military service members or veterans may call Stop Soldier Suicide **24/7** at **844-503-0553**.
- The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is **800-273-8255**.