

Words Matter: The Language of Suicide Prevention

The words we use to talk about suicide matter. Some phrases can unintentionally cause harm, add stigma, or make it harder for people to seek help. By choosing inclusive and nonjudgmental language, we can reduce stigma and create space for open, caring conversations. Below are examples of what to say — and what to avoid.

SAY THIS

Died by suicide

NOT THAT

Committed suicide

The word 'commit' suggests suicide is a crime or sin, and this judgment may interfere with critical awareness efforts. Suicide is a public health issue, not a moral failing.

Took their own life
Killed themselves
Suicide attempt

(Non)fatal suicide attempt
(Un)successful suicide attempt

Focus on using clear, objective language that does not judge someone or the situation.

(Name) is living with thoughts of suicide

(Name) is suicidal

Person-first language respects individuals by recognizing they are more than their suicidal thoughts.