

Words That Protect:




Why Language Matters in Suicide Prevention

The language we use has the power to shape perceptions, influence behavior, and either create connection or reinforce stigma. When we choose words that are current, inclusive, and protective, we help create safer environments where people feel seen, respected, and supported. This is especially important when talking about suicide and the ways we choose to communicate about it. Thoughtful language can open doors to honest conversations, reduce fear or shame, and make it easier for individuals to seek help.

Every word counts:

We have the opportunity to use them in ways that lift people up.

It is important to recognize that language is always evolving, and none of us will get it right every time. Give yourself and others grace as you learn. When we know better, we do better. If you use a word that isn't the most current, helpful, or protective language, do your best to acknowledge it, apologize if needed, and keep moving forward. It's more important to stay engaged in caring conversations than to aim for perfection. Don't let the pursuit of saying everything exactly right get in the way of connection and support.

 Language to Avoid	 Why This Matters	 Protective Language
Committed suicide	Association with crime or sin	Died of/by suicide
Successful attempt, completed suicide	A suicide death isn't a success/completion	Suicide death
Unsuccessful attempt, failed suicide	A suicide attempt isn't an achievement	Suicide attempt
Chose to kill him/her/themselves	Implies it was a rational choice when it may have been related to a crisis	Took his/her/their own life
_____ is suicidal	People are more than their suicidal thoughts	_____ is experiencing suicidal thoughts/behavior
Just doing it for attention	Implies the behavior is trivial instead of encouraging support-seeking behaviors	Expressing distress or reaching out for help