

Safe Messaging around Mental Health and Suicide

A GUIDE FOR PUBLIC MESSAGES

Building a narrative of hope and resilience

Too often, public messaging conveys negative narratives about mental health and suicide. These negative narratives stigmatize mental health and suicide, which can contribute to feelings of uncertainty, shame, and self-loathing that prevent someone from seeking help or put them at greater risk for harm. The stigma also prolongs and intensifies the grieving process for those who've lost a loved one to suicide.

Instead, building a narrative of hope and resilience helps create stories or narratives about mental health promotion and suicide prevention. This hopeful narrative can influence how people think, feel, and act and allows for us to send a clear message that there is hope, there is help, and suicide is preventable.

No single message alone creates a narrative, but every message adds to it. By including positive messages of suicide prevention, we can help shape the public's views and response.

Avoid the Following Language	Why?	Alternative Language / Use Instead
Committed suicide	Associates suicide with crime or sin	Died by suicide or took their life
Person/behavior is crazy, sick, psycho, cuckoo, nuts, lunatic	Calling people by their illness or using slang terms reinforces stigma/decreases help seeking	Behavior was unusual Person living with mental illness
Bipolar/schizophrenic weather Psychotic animal	Dismisses mental illness and creates misunderstanding	Find words that replace misuse of mental health terms: indecisive, confusing, strange, etc.
Successful/Completed suicide; Failed or Unsuccessful attempt	Presenting suicide as a desired or positive outcome	Suicide death; died by suicide; ended their life; attempt to end their life; nonfatal self-injury
Skyrocketing rates Alarming Suicide epidemic	Sensationalizes suicide and can decrease help seeking	Increasing/decreasing rates Rising Higher

Avoid the Following Language	Why?	Alternative Language / Use Instead
Troubling Problematic Disturbing Struggling	Adds blame, increases stigma, and can imply a lack of quality of life for people with mental illness	Words of empathy/care Concerning Trend is worrisome Living with/Has a diagnosis of
Happy pills Shrink Mental institution Social suicide Career suicide	Minimizes seriousness of mental illness and suicide. Can undermine willingness to seek help.	Say what you mean: Antidepressant Mental Health Care Provider Psychiatrist Harm to social life/career

Imagery

Don't use:

- graphic images of suicide or the location where someone has died by suicide.
- images of isolation, stress, or depression.
- images of common methods of suicide.
- dark, threatening, worrying colors and branding.
- sensational images.

Do use:

- images of hope and resilience, of enjoying one's life and living in recovery.

Do use — examples



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To obtain this information in a different format, call: 651-201-5400