

# Language Guide:

## *Guidelines for Writing & Talking About Suicide*

Suicide prevention advocates and researchers agree that how we talk about suicide can reduce stigma, encourage people to seek help, and support effective prevention programs. Face the Fight is committed to using accurate, respectful language in our suicide prevention efforts. In this document, we provide guidance adapted from [Johns Hopkins, Bloomberg School of Public Health - How To Talk About Suicide.](#)

### **Carefully Consider Language**

Suicide prevention experts note that some phrases once considered acceptable – such as “committed suicide” or “killed themselves” – can carry associations with crime or sin and are no longer recommended. Instead, use person-centered language like “died by suicide,” which avoids implying blame or judgment. For example, we say “died from cancer,” not that someone “committed” cancer. This shift in language helps reduce stigma.

Also, avoid terms like “successful” or “failed” when describing suicide attempts, as they can reinforce harmful stigma. Use neutral, factual, and life-affirming language to encourage hope, highlights available support, and promotes healing.

### **Emphasize Help and Hope**

Talking about suicide can also open the door to conversations about recovery. Sharing stories of help-seeking and healthy coping can be powerful.

### **Report Suicide As a Public Health Issue**

Framing suicide as a public health issue means not treating it as a crime or sensational news. Share general information without speculation, blame, or shame, and focus on broader causes and solutions – not just individual ones. This approach can reduce stigma and encourage people to speak openly and seek help.

### **Include Resources**

Coverage of suicide is an opportunity to connect people with help. Include a content warning and information on how to get support for anyone who may be struggling. Place these resources at the top so they are easy to find, even if the reader doesn’t finish the article.

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### Exclude Specific Details

Avoid including details about the method or location of the death. People who are struggling may identify with the person in the story, and specific details can increase risk by providing a way to act on harmful thoughts.

Be mindful of the language and information you share to promote safety and prevent harm. At the same time, **talking about suicide – or asking someone if they are having suicidal thoughts – does NOT increase risk and can help people feel supported.**

Say This	Not That
Death by suicide Die by suicide Died by suicide	Victim of suicide Committed suicide Completed suicide
Suicidal thoughts Suicidal behaviors Suicide attempt Lived through a suicide attempt	Successful suicide Unsuccessful suicide Failed attempt
Rising, increasing	Epidemic, skyrocketing
He is facing suicide / thinking of suicide / experiencing suicidal thoughts They have schizophrenia / are living with schizophrenia People with mental illness People addicted to [substance] People with addiction	He's suicidal  They're a schizophrenic  She's bipolar The mentally ill  Addicts
For suicide loss survivors: I'm sorry for your loss I'm here for you	For suicide loss survivors: They are in a better place now They are no longer hurting

### Need Crisis Support?

*If you or someone you know is struggling and needs immediate, professional help:*

**Suicide and Crisis Hotline**

Call 988 and press 1 for veteran support or visit [veteranscrisisline.net](http://veteranscrisisline.net) to talk with a VA responder.

**Crisis Text Line**

Text SERVE or SERVICIO to 741741 for free, 24/7, and confidential support in English and Spanish.