

WORDS MATTER:

The Language of Suicide

It can feel uncomfortable, and sometimes even scary, to talk about mental health and suicide prevention, even though many people have been touched by suicide in some way. The term suicide centered lived experience refers to anyone who has had or is currently experiencing thoughts of suicide, survived one or more suicide attempts, lost a loved one to suicide, or provided substantial support to a person with experience of suicide (Roses in the Ocean, 2023). By finding the courage within ourselves to engage in open discussions, we can help save lives. Here are some tips that may help when engaging in courageous conversations.

SAY THIS...	WHY?
Died by suicide death by suicide lost their life to suicide	Compassionate, nonjudgmental language helps reduce stigma and acknowledges suicide as a complex health issue—not a crime or moral failing.
Survived a suicide attempt fatal suicide attempt non-fatal suicide attempt	Clear, nonjudgmental language respects the person's experience and avoids stigmatizing or misleading terms like "failed" or "successful" attempt.
[Name] is facing suicide [Name] is thinking of suicide [Name] has experienced suicidal thoughts	Respectful, person-centered language acknowledges their experience without defining them by it or using stigmatizing labels.
[Name] lives with schizophrenia People with mental illness [Name] has a substance use disorder	Person-first language shows respect for the individual, reinforcing the fact that their condition does not define them.

Additional Resources

- [Safe and Effective Messaging for Suicide Prevention](#): Evidence-based recommendations from the Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC).
- [Recommendations for Reporting on Suicide](#): This guide covers key points for reporting on suicide safely, including do's and don'ts and tips for online media and bloggers.
- [Framework for Successful Messaging](#): Created by the National Action Alliance
- [Mental Health Media Guide](#): Created by mental health experts and entertainment leaders to help storytellers portray mental health more accurately and authentically.

Always provide information for assistance, such as the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. You can order free wallet cards and magnets from the [SAMHSA store](#).