

What is Safe Messaging?

How you talk about suicide impacts others. It can influence perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors, such as how people view or decide to seek help. Safe Messaging focuses on avoiding potentially harmful messaging content. It is for everyone, and for all types of communication.

Why is it Important?

Certain types of messaging on suicides can increase risk among vulnerable individuals. Conversely, communication can be a powerful tool to promote resiliency, encourage seeking help, publicize prevention successes, and encourage actions that help prevent suicide.

What Content is Unsafe?

These recommendations are based on research showing that certain types of messaging about suicide deaths may spur imitation of suicidal behavior among vulnerable individuals. Increased risk is associated with:

- Repeated and prominent coverage on a suicide
- Portraying suicide as a common or acceptable response to adversity
- Using data or language that suggests suicide is inevitable or unsolvable
- Presenting simplistic explanations for suicide
- Reinforcing negative stereotypes, myths, or stigma related to mental illnesses or person with suicide thoughts/behaviors

Promote a “Positive” Narrative

Too often, public messaging conveys negative narratives about suicide, for example, that nothing can be done about it. Instead, promote the following narrative:

- there are actions that people can take to help prevent suicide
- prevention works
- resilience and recovery are possible
- effective programs and services exist
- help is available

UNSAFE	SAFE
Saying "committed suicide" or that a suicide attempt was "unsuccessful"	Describe as "died by suicide" or "suicide attempt"
Saying suicide is not preventable	Encourage help-seeking and self-care by providing options
Using derogatory language such as crazy, psycho, cuckoo, nuts, lunatic, ect...	Use non-stigmatizing language, like person living with mental illness
Talking about suicide as a crime	Make it clear that suicide is public health issue
Using dark and hopeless imagery	Use imagery that conveys hope and connection
Presenting suicide as a common or acceptable response to hardship (sensationalizing or glamorizing)	Share the coping skills, support, and treatment work for most people who have thoughts about suicide
Oversimplifying or speculating on the reason for suicide	Suicide is complex - describe suicide warning signs and risk factors
Overstating the problem of suicide by using descriptors like "epidemic" or "skyrocketing"	Research the best available data and use words like "increase" or "rise"
Spreading negative stereotypes, myths, or stigma related to mental illnesses or person with suicide thoughts/behaviors	Provide context and facts to counter negative perceptions