

DO ✓

DON'T ✗

WHY?

A guide to talking
safely about suicide



Do

Give people hope. While suicide is complex, it is preventable.



Don't

Talk about suicide as though it is inevitable.



Why

Hopelessness is often a feeling many people who are suicidal or who die by suicide have in common. Work to create hope. Talk about suicide prevention and where to go for support.





Do

Talk about what causes suicidal distress and how to address these.



Don't

Say all people in a certain group (e.g. people who are bullied, are having relationship issues or in financial distress) are at risk of suicide.



Why

It is impossible to predict who will try to take their own life. While it's important to understand factors that can be associated with suicide, we don't want to normalise suicide. Suicide is never inevitable.





Do

Talk about people ‘dying by suicide’ (e.g. “I had a friend who died by suicide”).



Don't

Use the term ‘commit’ or ‘committed’ suicide (e.g. “he attempted to commit suicide”).



Why

The word ‘commit’ increases the stigma around suicide for people who have had their own experiences of suicidality, and for those bereaved by suicide. ‘Commit’ is generally only used when talking about crime.





Do

Know your stats and only use official suicide data. Say 'higher/lower rates' or 'concerning rates' when referring to statistics.



Don't

Sensationalise numbers or share or speculate about increases in suicide for certain groups, locations or professions.



Why

Rumours about suicide clusters, spikes or increases are often false and can increase a sense of hopelessness for people. They can also normalise suicide as a response to tough situations.





Do

Remind people that suicide is complex and influenced by a combination of factors, such as feelings, actions, circumstances and unwellness. There is rarely a single reason why someone takes their own life.



Don't

Attribute suicide to a single cause (e.g. bullying, natural disasters, or working in a particular profession).



Why

Simplifying the causes of suicide puts more people at risk (if they identify with that cause) and contributes to misunderstandings about how suicide can be prevented.





Do

Remember the person, not their death.



Don't

Talk about the details of a suicide (including method and location).



Why

Details about someone's death are unnecessary and can be deeply distressing. Talking about the method used or the location can also increase the risk for people who may be experiencing suicidality.





Do

Talk about mental health as something we all have, in the same way we all have physical health.



Don't

Use 'mental health' when you mean 'mental distress' or 'mental illness'.



Why

At any one time at least one in five of us will be experiencing mental distress or illness. We want people to know their mental wellbeing is something they can always strengthen.





Do

Acknowledge suicide loss with humility, sadness and aroha.



Don't

Portray suicide as a selfish act or focus on how it has harmed people bereaved by suicide.



Why

It's important to avoid talking about suicide in ways that increase stigma or imply a sense of shame. This can cause people to hide their suicidality and avoid seeking support. Those bereaved by suicide may not want to talk about their feelings and seek support if there's a focus on shame and blame.





Do

Always mention and provide details for support services. Normalise help-seeking as a healthy step to take.



Don't

Assume people know where and how to access help.



Why

Help-seeking can carry stigma for some people. Encouraging help-seeking and talking openly about where and how to access support can help remove that stigma, boost wellbeing and potentially save lives.

