

# Safe Messaging around Mental Health and Suicide

**A G U I D E F O R P U B L I C MESSAGES**

## Building a narrative of hope and resilience

Too often, public messaging conveys negative narratives about mental health and suicide. This can discourage people from help-seeking behaviors – no one wants to add to the problem.

Building a narrative of hope and resilience can help change public perception to one that believes suicide is preventable, recovery is possible, and help is available.

The goal is to increase the likelihood the public will receive positive and helpful messages of hope and resilience. 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.

| **Don’t say** | **Why?** | **Try saying** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Committed suicide | Associates suicide with crime or sin | Died by suicide or took their life |
| Person/behavior is crazy, psycho, cuckoo, nuts, lunatic, schizo | Calling people by their illness or using slang terms reinforces stigma/decreases help seeking | Behavior was unusualPerson living with mental illness |
| Bipolar/schizophrenic weatherPsychotic animal | Dismisses mental illness and creates misunderstanding  | Find words that replace misuse of MH 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 ratesAlarmingSuicide epidemic | Sensationalizes suicide and can decrease help seeking | Increasing/decreasing ratesRisingHigher |
| TroublingProblematicDisturbingStruggling | Adds blame, increases stigma, and can imply a lack of quality of life for people with mental illness | Words of empathy/careConcerningTrend is worrisomeLiving with/Has a diagnosis of |
| Happy pillsShrinkMental institutionSocial suicideCareer suicide | Minimizes seriousness of mental illness and suicide. Can undermine willingness to seek help. | Say what you mean:AntidepressantMental Health Care ProviderPsychiatristHarm 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