Language Guidelines
IASP Pan-America Regional Forum

Certain language can be problematic when discussing suicide. The language guide below provides some examples of problematic language and suggested safer alternatives. These language guidelines aim to reduce risk of harm while increasing awareness and understanding of suicide and its complexities.

PROBLEMATIC	PREFERRED
'Committed suicide' or 'Commit suicide'	'Died by suicide' or 'Took their own life' or Suicide death'
'Unsuccessful suicide' or 'Failed suicide'	'Suicide attempt' or 'Non-fatal suicide attempt'
'Successful suicide attempt'	'A fatal suicide attempt'
'Suicide victim'	'Those who die by suicide'

Avoid sharing details of suicide method and location

Research shows that public communication that includes descriptions of suicide method or location has been associated with increased rates of suicide behaviour and imitation of the suicide method/location.

PROBLEMATIC	PREFERRED
Detail about method or location of suicide	No details of method or location. If needed, use general terms instead of specific details.
Images that show method or location of a suicide	No photos, illustrations, diagrams or video that show suicide method or location.

If in need of support, visit the 'Find a Helpline' online tool on the IASP website: www.iasp.info/suicidalthoughts

IASP