



The Language of Suicide

An important objective of suicide prevention is to remove the stigma associated with suicide and mental health issues so that people will be more likely to seek the help they need. One of the ways we can do this is to be conscious of our use of language.

The term “committed suicide” implies a level of criminality while “completed suicide” implies earlier attempts when there may have been none. Both terms (committed and completed) perpetuate the stigma associated with suicide and are strongly discouraged. Using the word “successful” or “failed” to describe suicide is also discouraged. Terms such as “died by suicide” or “died of suicide” as well as “suicide death” and “fatal suicide behaviour” are recommended. Sensitive use of suicide related language is appreciated.

It is expected that the issues and solutions of language usage will continue to evolve as the field of suicide prevention continues to grow. Acknowledging that many within IASP’s network and reach have English as a second, third or other language and that language is deep rooted, it is important that IASP promote a guide to language that does not vilify those who use terminology we advocate against but encourages the adoption of preferred terminology.

Current guide:

LANGUAGE GUIDELINES



International Association
for Suicide Prevention

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.

Responsible reporting of suicide during COVID- 19 :

<https://youtu.be/gozDLnno7A>

[Reporting on Suicide During the COVID- 19 Pandemic](#), IASP & SAVE

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

