



Navy Suicide Prevention

WHAT'S IN A WORD? HOW TO TALK ABOUT SUICIDE

Discussing matters of suicide is critical to prevention, intervention and postvention-- but how we talk about it makes a difference. Words matter. Consider using these best practices to encourage help-seeking behaviors.

Avoid using judgmental language.

When trying to encourage behavioral change, certain words in our everyday language can discourage people from speaking up about their stress, or seeking help. "Stigma" is a commonly used but judgmental word that can prompt feelings of shame and weakness. Using less explicit terms, like "barriers", can reduce negative perceptions and are more effective ways to address stigma. Changing the way we talk about suicide is essential to creating a Navy culture that is supportive of those who have the strength to speak up when they're down.

Use objective terms for suicidal events, such as "death by suicide" or "non-fatal suicide attempt."

Suicide is better understood when framed objectively within the context of behavioral health. The term "committed suicide" criminalizes the act. Additionally, stating that a suicide attempt was "successful" or "failed" implies that suicide is a desirable outcome.

Avoid presenting suicide as an inevitable event, or oversimplifying the cause.

Most suicidal people exhibit warning signs, which may be caused or exacerbated by mental illness and/or substance abuse disorders. However, no one should feel as though suicide is the inevitable solution. Discuss risk factors commonly associated with suicide to increase awareness and promote seeking treatment. It's best to shift the focus away from speculated causes of a single case. Revealing unconfirmed details may lead to

generalizations that could normalize the event and hinder postvention efforts.

Avoid glamorizing deaths by suicide.

Although "peace" may be a desirable state for those who are tormented with stress and those who are not, stating that a person found peace through death by suicide glorifies the act. Dying by suicide may sound more attractive to those who are struggling to cope with psychological pain when it seems like an escape. Instead, separate the person's positive life accomplishments from his/her final act.

When discussing the frequency of suicide, always emphasize the importance of every single life.

Describing a "rise" in the number of suicides may normalize it to vulnerable individuals, or frame it as a trend. An increase in numbers shows that the force is under stress and underscores the importance of seeking help and the need for peer and leadership support. Always emphasize that every life lost to suicide is one too many.

Always provide information for assistance.

To promote help-seeking behavior, accompany discussions of suicidal matters with available resources.

LIFELINE: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

OR TEXT 838255

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AVAILABLE AT:

WWW.SUICIDE.NAVY.MIL