

Tips for Talking about Suicide

Suicide is a difficult topic for most people to talk about. This tool suggests ways to talk about key issues that may come up when someone dies by suicide.

<p>Give accurate information about suicide.</p> <p>Suicide is a complicated behavior. It is not caused by a single event.</p> <p>In many cases, mental health conditions, such as depression, bipolar disorder, PTSD, or psychosis, or a substance use disorder are present leading up to a suicide. Mental health conditions affect how people feel and prevent them from thinking clearly. Having a mental health problem is actually common and nothing to be ashamed of. Help is available.</p> <p>Talking about suicide in a calm, straightforward way does not put the idea into people's minds.</p>	<p>By saying...</p> <p>"The cause of [NAME]'s death was suicide. Suicide is not caused by a single event. In many cases, the person has a mental health or substance use disorder and then other life issues occur at the same time leading to overwhelming mental and/or physical pain, distress, and hopelessness."</p> <p>"There are effective treatments to help people with mental health or substance abuse problems or who are having suicidal thoughts."</p> <p>"Mental health problems are not something to be ashamed of. They are a type of health issue."</p>
<p>Address blaming and scapegoating.</p> <p>It is common to try to answer the question "why?" after a suicide death. Sometimes this turns into blaming others for the death.</p>	<p>By saying...</p> <p>"Blaming others or the person who died does not consider the fact that the person was experiencing a lot of distress and pain. Blaming is not fair and can hurt another person deeply."</p>
<p>Do not focus on the method.</p> <p>Talking in detail about the method can create images that are upsetting and can increase the risk of imitative behavior by vulnerable individuals.</p> <p>The focus should not be on how someone killed themselves but rather on how to cope with feelings of sadness, loss, anger, etc.</p>	<p>By saying...</p> <p>"Let's talk about how [NAME]'s death has affected you and ways you can handle it."</p> <p>"How can you deal with your loss and grief?"</p>
<p>Address anger.</p> <p>Accept expressions of anger at the deceased and explain that these feelings are normal.</p>	<p>By saying...</p> <p>"It is okay to feel angry. These feelings are normal, and it doesn't mean that you didn't care about [NAME]. You can be angry at someone's behavior and still care deeply about that person."</p>

Address feelings of responsibility.	By saying...
<p>Help students understand that they are not responsible for the suicide of the deceased.</p> <p>Reassure those who feel responsible or think they could have done something to save the deceased.</p>	<p>"This death is not your fault. We cannot always see the signs because a suicidal person may hide them."</p> <p>"We cannot always predict someone else's behavior."</p>

Promote help-seeking.	By saying...
<p>Encourage students to seek help from a trusted adult if they or a friend are feeling depressed.</p>	<p>"Seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness."</p> <p>"We are always here to help you through any problem, no matter what. Who are the people you would go to if you or a friend were feeling worried or depressed or had thoughts of suicide?"</p> <p>"If you are concerned about yourself or a friend, talk with a trusted adult."</p>