Our Words Matter: Talking about Suicide

Mind
Brent, Wandsworth and Westminster

The words we choose when talking about suicide matter. Language can be a powerful tool to help challenge the stigma around suicide.

Don't avoid conversations through worry you'll say the wrong thing. When talking about suicide, what matters is that you are genuine, empathetic and use compassionate language.

✗ AVOID: Commit/committed suicide

👍 **SAY: Died by suicide, lost their life to suicide, took their own life**

❓ 'Commit' can imply suicide is a crime or sin. Before the Suicide Act 1961, suicide was considered a crime in the UK. Using neutral phrasing can help eliminate feelings of shame or blame attached to the word commit.

✗ AVOID: Successful/Failed suicide or suicide attempt

👍 **SAY: Suicide attempt/ survived a suicide attempt**

❓ We don't want to use language which frames suicide as an achievement or failure. We wouldn't use 'successful heart attack' to describe physical health, so it's important compassionate terminology extends to mental health.

✗ AVOID: Are you having dark thoughts? You're not thinking of doing anything silly, are you?

👍 **SAY: Are you thinking of ending your life? Have you had thoughts of suicide?**

❓ It's important to ask directly about suicide using non-judgemental language to show someone we are taking them seriously. Avoid vague, ambiguous phrases which can cause misunderstandings.

✗ AVOID: [NAME] is suicidal

👍 **SAY: [NAME] is thinking of suicide/ has experienced suicidal thoughts**

❓ We want to use people-first language which does not define someone by their experience with suicide.