

SPEAKING OUT About Suicide



Telling your story can save lives, but only if you share it safely.

Speaking out about suicide loss and suicide attempts is critical to prevention. Sharing your story lets people know they are not alone and shows them recovery is possible. If done well, you will encourage people at risk to seek help. Unsafe sharing, however, can do more harm than good.

DO

Be at a safe place in your recovery. Reflect on your own frame of mind. As a general guideline, wait at least one year after the attempt or loss before speaking.

Define key messages. Your story should not simply express pain. Your goal should be to educate and inspire hope.

Practice. Speak slowly, and time your talk to fit into the overall program.

Present the narrative. Emphasize the journey. Talk about both before and after the loss or attempt, and how you've healed since.

Know your audience. Consider who you will be talking to (e.g., students, clinicians, survivors) and tailor your remarks.

Be honest and comprehensive. Do not focus solely on the loss or attempt. Include the full range of your experience, both the positive and the negative.

Provide mental health resources for your audience to take home, like the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline or AFSP's website.

AVOID

Avoid phrases like "commit suicide" or "successful attempt." These phrases perpetuate suicide's stigma and moral judgment. Preferred terms: ended life; died by suicide; killed him/herself.

Avoid details about suicide methods. It is okay to reference the method, but details can prompt copycat suicides.

Avoid simplifying suicide. Reducing the attempt or loss to a single cause fails to educate the public about the many warning signs and risk factors that can signal an attempt.

Avoid glorifying suicide. Portraying suicide as honorable or romantic can influence vulnerable individuals to view suicide as a viable option.

Avoid portraying suicide as an option. Suicide is not a rational backup plan or coping behavior.

