

Speaking Out About Suicide



Telling your story can save lives and be a part of a healthy healing process, but only if you share it safely. Sharing your experience lets people know they are not alone and lets them know recovery is possible. If done safely, your story will encourage people at risk to seek help.

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. Sharing your story may bring up unexpected emotions. Be sure to practice aloud so that you're prepared to speak calmly and slowly in front of others.

Emphasize the journey. Talk about both before and after the loss or attempt, and how far you've come in your recovery.

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

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, and how you manage your mental health today.

Provide mental health resources for your audience to take home, like the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at 988, the Crisis Text Line (text TALK or AYUDA to 741741), or afsp.org.

Avoid

Don't use phrases like "commit suicide" or "successful attempt." These phrases perpetuate shame and moral judgment. Preferred terms are "ended one's life" or "died by suicide."

Avoid details about suicide methods. Don't refer to lethal means unless your story would be incomplete to the listener without it. If mentioned, be brief and avoid including details, since graphic descriptions can be triggering to those who struggle, and cause contagion.

Don't simplify suicide. Reducing the attempt or loss to a single cause fails to educate the public about the many warning signs and multiple risk factors that can signal an attempt.

Don't glorify suicide. Portraying suicide as honorable or romantic can lead others to view suicide as a viable option.

Avoid portraying suicide as an option. Suicide is not a rational backup plan or coping behavior. It is a health-related crisis, and help is always available.