The Language of Suicide
Words we use shape mindset and co-create our reality

Our goal: to destigmatize suicide and mental illness as we create safe communities of conversation and support.

These are summary notes from the following articles about the language of suicide and mental health:

https://www.irmi.com/articles/expert-commentary/language-matters-committed-suicide
http://auccco.com/resources/Documents/guide-for-speaking-publicly-about-suicide.pdf
https://suicidepreventionmessaging.org/safety/messaging-donts
https://www.huffpost.com/entry/showing-mental-health-stigma_n_5ae50d3de4b055fd7fcc52db/amp
https://www.suicideinfo.ca/resource/suicideandlanguage/

2 Areas of Language Use
1. Personal Conversation
2. Public Messaging

Personal Conversation: Why the change in language?
- This impetus to change the language of suicide began in the bereavement community.
- Insensitive language used to describe suicide, plus silence and denial are major contributors to the stigma of suicide.
- "When a tragedy is not spoken of openly there can be no true sympathy, sharing or healing," Sommer – Rottenburg, p.240).
- Those who are left behind feel the full burden of suicide's stigma
- Others often steer clear of suicide survivors to avoid the "contamination" of suicide association. The bereaved can feel abandoned and ashamed.
- Adding to this injury is the mention of suicide in euphemistic, obituary-type language.
- The need for language that addresses the act of suicide in a direct but respectful way has, in recent years, gathered momentum.

Personal Messaging: Some suggestions

Say this	Instead of this
Died of/by/from suicide	Committed suicide
Suicide death	Successful attempt
Suicide attempt	Unsuccessful attempt
Person living with suicidal thoughts or behavior	Suicide ideator or attempter
Suicide	Completed suicide
(Describe the behavior)	Manipulative, cry for help, or suicidal gesture
Working with	Dealing with suicidal crisis

Public Messaging: the challenge
- Suicide prevention is a hard sell.
- Well-meaning professionals often make serious errors when crafting messages for suicide prevention.
- We think that we need to grab the public's attention through graphic and scary messages.
- This messaging turns people off.
- Instead, we align with our audience's beliefs, values, priorities, and needs.
- We craft messages that are:1. positively engaging; 2. provide people with the information we want them to remember; and 3 give them action steps.

Public Messaging: the opportunity
- Workplaces, schools, faith communities, and healthcare systems can help model safe and compassionate language.
- We can challenge the misinformation and myths that exist.
- We can learn how to effectively disseminate our messages to large numbers of people.
- We craft safe and powerful messages, work collaboratively with traditional media outlets, and strategically use social media.
- Instead of just "raising awareness" by sharing statistics of suicide death, we can inspire hope by sharing stories of recovery and letting them know that help is available.