

Accurate Language and Concepts About Suicide

By changing the way we talk about suicide, we change the way we think of it. In general the language used for any other illness-based death or sudden loss (such as a heart attack or car accident) is a guiding principle.

- **Died of suicide** (Also 'Died by suicide') - Suicide is death due to brain illnesses. In a suicidal state thought processes become distorted because of biological, psychological, social, cultural and/or situational reasons. Suicidal people are not thinking clearly. They are in fact struggling with a kind of illness in their thinking processes. The term "Committed suicide" does not describe accurately what has occurred. *Committed* implies a crime or immoral act. Suicide is no longer seen as a crime or sin but is recognized to be the result of a mental health condition with a medically treatable cause at least 90% of the time. Often a person with lived experience of suicide will say choice was not involved but instead they were overwhelmingly "compelled" to attempt to kill themselves.
- **Person with lived experience** - A person with the lived experience of suicide has struggled with suicidal thoughts or behaviors and may be an attempt survivor. Resilience is a skill that can be developed - one is not "permanently fragile" when they are an attempt survivor.
- **Bereaved by suicide** - Someone who has been exposed to the suicide of another person and experiences a high level of psychological, physical and/or social distress for a considerable length of time. In the U.S. the term "loss survivor" is often used. This loss can cause PTSD, complicated grief or other deleterious physical and mental consequences. Everyone grieves differently and on their own timeline. Incorporating such a loss into one's life requires work and support.
- **Fatal or Non-fatal Attempt**— Applying the general principle of speaking about suicide using illness based language, fatal and non-fatal is language in line with a fatal or non-fatal heart attack or other illness. It is not advised to add a value statement to suicide such as calling an attempt failed, successful, or botched, etc. Also the term "completed" suicide is not advised. Completing something implies success.

Suicide is a complex phenomenon. It does not have to do with an individual's willpower. There is no simple explanation for any suicide. Though an immediate precipitating event may occur, that is not the "reason" someone has died.

People often ask what to say to a person who has lost someone to suicide. Generally, it is advised to think of what one would say or do if the person had lost their loved one suddenly in a fatal car crash or a heart attack - then do and say that.